

**MADAME DE GENLIS: ENVIRONMENT, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE NATION
IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the
University of St Andrews

26 October 2015

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ABSTRACT

Through an ecocritical lens, this thesis investigates the interrelatedness of the themes of environment, citizenship, and nation in Madame de Genlis's depiction of post-Revolutionary France. At the heart of the ecocritical project is the notion that humankind must re-evaluate its relationship with the endangered natural world in order to protect the ecosphere; ecocriticism provides tools for re-conceptualising the ways human communities exist, and have existed, in their respective environments. A prolific author of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Madame de Genlis engages with such issues in her texts, responding to serious threats posed to the survival of rural communities following the French Revolution, such as the disintegration of socio-political hierarchies, the rise of individualism, and the mismanagement of agricultural land. In the light of post-Revolutionary discourses of *liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité*, this thesis explores how Madame de Genlis's texts present reconstructive narrative strategies for coming to terms with dramatic socio-political upheaval. In particular, her instructional texts – hitherto neglected by scholarship – encourage readers to re-personalise their relationship with the natural world by exploring the multiple moral and practical dimensions of the rural home. Madame de Genlis's preoccupation with the natural world, expressed here in terms of a 'rural model', is the subject of the first chapter. The second chapter examines the notion of social responsibility within this model, while the third chapter considers the ways in which texts, as socio-cultural products, contribute to the re-imagining of a nation under construction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff at the School of Modern Languages for their continued support during my PhD studies, and for the wealth of opportunities which have allowed me to develop my skills as an academic researcher. I owe special thanks to my initial supervisor, Dr David Culpin who encouraged me to return to St Andrews to undertake the PhD, and who first introduced me to Madame de Genlis's work. I am also particularly grateful for the award of a Sévigné Scholarship which I received during the second and third year of my studies, from the Gapper Charitable Trust – made possible through the support of the School.

So many friends and family members have helped me throughout my studies. In particular, Catherine Barbour's friendship – and limitless optimism – has been a true blessing. I am also indebted to my parents Anne and Richard, and my brother Rhys, for their unending support. It is difficult to find words to convey adequate thanks to my fiancé, Christopher Peys, for everything he has done.

Finally, I must express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr David Evans, who has so generously given me his time and support throughout this process. I am so thankful to him for his guidance and encouragement. Without him this thesis could not have been completed. Diolch o'r galon am dy gymorth Dave.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ECOCRITICISM AND MADAME DE GENLIS.....	11
Primary Corpus.....	23
<i>État Présent</i>	31
Methodology and Chapter Outlines.....	39
 CHAPTER ONE: THE RURAL MODEL.....	 47
Understanding the Natural World: Nature as <i>Oikos</i>	48
The Post-Revolutionary Rural Environment as a Post-Fall Eden.....	70
Colonising the Rural Environment.....	79
The Architecture of the Rural Dwelling.....	86
Conclusion.....	96
 CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.....	 99
Social Responsibility and Hierarchy in the <i>Oikos</i>	103
Labour as a Socially Responsible Practice in Rural Communities:	
The Work of Perfecting Nature.....	111
Necessity and Freedom in Rural Hierarchies.....	118
Economy and <i>Oikos</i>	122
Social Knowledge as Wealth in the <i>Oikos</i>	133
Conclusion.....	143
 CHAPTER THREE: THE PRODUCTIVE PASTORAL:	
IMAGINING THE NATION THROUGH CULTURE.....	145
The Pastoral Shepherd in Madame de Genlis's Writing.....	151
The Aesthetic of Solitude in the Pastoral Landscape.....	163
Conclusion.....	175
 CONCLUSION.....	 177
SOURCES CITED.....	188
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	202

**MADAME DE GENLIS: ENVIRONMENT, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE NATION
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INTRODUCTION:
ECOCRITICISM AND MADAME DE GENLIS

First recognised as an established area of literary and cultural criticism in the early nineties, ecocriticism was conceived as a framework within which to analyse representations of nature and the environment in response to global ecological crisis. William Rueckert, who is credited with coining the term in 1978, envisages a space in which we might seek to preserve humankind's ecological home, and 'find the grounds upon which the two communities – the human, the natural – can coexist, cooperate and flourish in the biosphere', in order to counteract what he describes as 'our unwitting march toward ecological suicide'.¹ While, in its broadest definition, this involves the study of the relationship between the human and the non-human throughout cultural history, Warwick Fox argues that ecocritical reading is as much a study of human societies as it is of the natural world:

Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all *members* of the ecosphere, but even towards all identifiable *entities* or *forms* in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right.²

At the heart of the ecocritical project, then, is the notion that humankind must re-evaluate its relationship not only with the endangered earth, but also with itself, in order to safeguard the ecosphere. It is a theoretical approach reflecting the values of the 'green movement' which, according to Martin Ryle, finds itself asking 'not just what kinds of social relations are ecologically viable, but what kinds are good; and so confronts the questions about justice,

¹ See William Rueckert's essay, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' (1978), in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105-123. Rueckert claimed that a state of environmental crisis was brought about 'because the means by which we use the ecosphere to produce wealth are destructive of the ecosystem itself. The present system of production is self-destructive. The present course of human civilization is suicidal [...] Human beings have broken out of the circle of life, driven not by biological need, but by social organization which they have devised to conquer nature' (p. 107 and p. 116). For a discussion of the etymology of 'ecocriticism', see William Howarth's essay, 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism', also in Glotfelty and Fromm.

² Warwick Fox, 'The Deep Ecology – Ecofeminism Debate and Its Parallels', in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by George Sessions (London: Shambhala, 1995), pp. 269-289 (pp. 269-270), (original emphasis).

autonomy and hierarchy, public and private spheres which have constituted political discourse since antiquity'.³ In order to illuminate such questions in literature, ecocritical scholars must therefore differentiate between 'problems in ecology' and 'ecological problems' – John Passmore, for example, views the former as 'scientific issues', while regarding the latter as 'features of society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society'.⁴

This attitude requires an understanding of 'ecology' which, rather than simply denoting the relationship between living organisms and their environment, is closer to the definition proposed by Aldo Leopold in 1947, namely 'the science of communities'.⁵ Leopold argued that he 'needed a short name for what was lacking' and subsequently developed the term 'ecological conscience', a notion which, in his view, pertains to the 'ethics of community life'.⁶ In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) he affirms that 'there is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it', adding that 'all ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts'.⁷ Rather than seeing human society as separate from and superior to the natural world, 'a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such'.⁸ More than simply a means of examining depictions of nature and contemporary issues affecting the environment in literature, ecocriticism provides the theoretical tools for re-conceptualising the ways in which human communities exist, and have existed, in their respective environments.

Madame de Genlis's writing engages at length with precisely these questions, responding to serious threats posed to the survival of rural communities following the French Revolution: famine, poverty, economic exploitation by returning landowners and mismanagement of land whose potential for agriculture goes unrealised. The overarching societal project which she presents in both her fiction and non-fiction offers strategies for moving forward in a nation under construction as a means of redressing the wrongs of the

³ Martin Ryle, *Ecology and Socialism* (London: Radius, 1988), pp. 6-8, 19-20, 60.

⁴ John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), p. 44.

⁵ Aldo Leopold, 'The Ecological Conscience' (1947), in *The River of Mother of God and Other Essays*, ed. by Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 338-347 (p. 340).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 168 and p. 171.

⁸ Ibid. Leopold comments that 'the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land' (p. 171).

Revolution and upholding its best principles. By presenting a moral ideology which is deeply rooted in environmental concerns, Madame de Genlis attempts to redefine French rural communities in light of post-Revolutionary discourses of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité*. Her work thus suggests ways in which human community may be rethought in response to socio-political and, ultimately, ecological crisis. This approach mirrors the contemporary ecocritical project, the environmental concerns of which are also grounded in an ethical discussion, as described by environmental scientist Robert J. Brulle:

Questions about the preservation of the environment are not just technical questions; they are also about what defines the good and moral life, about essence and existence. Hence these are not just academic or technical matters, to be settled in elite dialogues between experts. These are fundamental questions of defining what our human community is and how it should exist.⁹

Brulle underlines the social causes of environmental deterioration and decline, and, just as Madame de Genlis does in the early nineteenth century, proposes a moral argument for profound societal change as essential to ecological sustainability. Like Brulle, she emphasises her commitment to social justice, equality, and the welfare of humankind throughout her writing:

On trouvera dans tous [mes écrits] la même horreur du despotisme et de l'intolérance; le même respect pour la religion et les mœurs, et les mêmes sentiments d'humanité, de générosité et d'intérêt pour le peuple; le même mépris du préjugé de la naissance, et le même amour de l'ordre, de la justice et de la vertu.¹⁰

Her long-term pedagogical interest in such ethical concerns informs her depictions of nature and the rural environment, and her work is replete with '*scènes champêtres*' which she presents 'successivement dans tous [ses] ouvrages'.¹¹ Practical instruction, recalling the importance which Brulle attaches to 'technical questions', is a fundamental aspect of her writing, especially with regard to the chief primary text of this study, the *Maison rustique* (1810).¹² It covers areas as diverse as mixing mortar, bee-keeping, linen care and the uses of coal, combining these practical points of guidance with moral instruction and elements of

⁹ Robert J. Brulle, *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 48.

¹⁰ Genlis, *Les Chevaliers du cygne ou La Cour de Charlemagne* (Paris: Lenierre, 1795), pp. ix – x. Eighteenth-century spelling in French has been modernized throughout this thesis.

¹¹ Genlis, *Botanique historique et littéraire, suivie d'une nouvelle intitulée Les Fleurs*, 2 vols (Paris: Maradan, 1810), I. vii (original emphasis).

¹² Genlis, *Maison rustique pour servir à la jeunesse ou Retour en France d'une famille émigrée*, 3 vols (Paris: Maradan, 1810).

cultural patrimony.¹³ Like Brulle's model, these are not texts intended primarily for elites or experts, but rather, for young people inhabiting the new French nation. Although she had been governess to Louis-Philippe, who, against her advice, would ascend to the throne in 1830 as *Roi des Français*, Madame de Genlis also considered herself a pioneer of public education.¹⁴ 'Je fus le premier auteur qui se soit occupé de l'éducation du peuple', she writes in 1784, adding, 'cette gloire est chère à mon cœur'.¹⁵ With its emphasis on pedagogy and on educating the future citizens of the nation, regardless of their background, her work broadens the possibility of defining what human community is and how it should exist in early nineteenth-century France.

According to her own model, the moral perfectibility of humankind, in its entirety, is possible through a renewed relationship with the natural world. In the preface to one of her early collections of moral tales, *Les Veillées du château* (1784), she states for example, that 'il entrain dans mon plan des idées de ne rien négliger pour inspirer aux enfants les goûts simples et vertueux qui rapprochent de la nature, et qui font aimer la vie champêtre'.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the *Maison rustique*, Madame de Genlis states that 'le goût de la campagne suppose une telle pureté de mœurs, que les anciens l'ont confondu avec la vertu elle-même', and, quoting a line of poetry by an unnamed 'poète moderne', she highlights the correlation between the two terms: 'qui fait aimer les champs fait aimer la vertu'.¹⁷ This is an idea which anticipates Aldo Leopold's notion of the 'land ethic', namely: 'that land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics'.¹⁸ Madame de Genlis's instructional texts encourage readers to re-evaluate their relationship with both nature and human communities by exploring the multiple moral, ethical and practical dimensions of the rural home. In her writings, this renewed relationship with the natural world serves to promote the development of ecologically sensitive citizens,

¹³ This will be demonstrated in a more detailed synopsis of the text, later in this introduction.

¹⁴ She was governess to Valois, who would become King Louis-Philippe (1773-1850), his two brothers – Antoine Duke of Montpensier (1775-1807) and Louis-Charles Count of Beaujolais (1779-1808), as well as to their sister Adélaïde (1777-1847). In her *Lettre de Silk* (Paris: Imprimerie de J. Smith, 1829), an open letter to Louis-Philippe written in March 1796, she derides him for his aspiration to restore a monarchy in France: 'Vous, prétendre à la royauté! Devenir un usurpateur, pour abolir une république que vous avez reconnue, que vous avez chérie, et pour laquelle vous avez combattu vaillamment! Et dans quel moment! Quand la France s'organise, le gouvernement s'établit; quand il paraît se fonder sur des bases solides de la morale et de la justice! Quel serait le degré de confiance que la France pourrait accorder à un roi constitutionnel de vingt-trois ans, qu'elle aurait vu, deux ans auparavant, ardent républicain, et le partisan le plus enthousiaste de l'égalité' (pp.7-8).

¹⁵ Genlis, *Les Veillées du château, ou cours morale à l'usage des enfants*, 4 vols (Lausanne: J. P. Heubach, 1784), I. xiii-xiv.

¹⁶ *Les Veillées du château*, I. viii.

¹⁷ *Maison rustique*, I. ix.

¹⁸ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 21.

preparing them to respond to the environmental and, thus, the social or ecological questions of their time.

From an ecocritical perspective, Madame de Genlis's writing therefore emerges not simply as educational, but as a comprehensive and holistic programme of reading which promotes ecological sensitivity. In her writing, proper care and respect for the rural landscape become the basis of a socio-cultural practice necessary for reconstructing the rural community, in such a way that she also contributes to the post-Revolutionary examination of national identity and French nationhood. This explicit connection between environment, ecological sensitivity and citizenship in the new nation evokes the grand social narratives of Marx and Engels which come to the fore in nineteenth-century France. Howard L. Parsons' edition of *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, for example, highlights the premise that 'the social relations of men to one another determine their concept of external nature, and in turn their relations of living and livelihood towards nature determine their social relations and their concepts of both society and nature'.¹⁹ It is in the nineteenth century that 'the truly modern concept of nature', that which 'is ecological or dialectical' emerges, in 'response to the revolutionary achievements in societies and the sciences, especially the biological and historical sciences'.²⁰

Parsons indicates that the perpetually transformative relationship between man and nature is often emphasised at this time, and understood in these terms, nature is a 'continuous motion, interconnection, and transformation', a 'ceaseless series of unities of opposites, which are mutually creative, mutually destructive, and mutually transforming'.²¹ An ecocritical reading of Madame de Genlis's work therefore contributes to three strong interconnected, and mutually transforming, narratives relating to nineteenth-century France that surface from recent scholarship on the period: the significance of the rural environment in the construction of socio-cultural identity, modern theories of nation building and the formation of national identity. In the pages that follow, reflection on these three strands will enhance our understanding not only of historical societal change but also of continuity between nineteenth-century and modern understandings of the environment, citizenship, and nation. In this light, Madame de Genlis's writing can be seen to respond to the intellectual climate of her time. As Alicia C. Montoya explains:

¹⁹ *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, ed. by Howard L. Parsons (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.129.

While the major *philosophes* – Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot – all died before the advent of the French revolution that claimed to realize their most radical ideas, Genlis outlived the Revolutionary period, and was witness to the transformation of radical political thought into Terror and post-Napoleonic reconstruction.²²

Distancing herself from the *philosophes* by continuously re-affirming the ‘natural’ foundation of her morality – based on what she believed were the divine origins of nature – she saw a destructive force in their atheistic tendencies and criticised their writings. In her ‘Malencontreux’, a moral tale from her collection of *Nouveaux contes moraux ou nouvelles historiques* (1802), when the protagonist, Kerkalis, asks his friend about the circumstances of the Revolution: ‘Et les philosophes n’ont donc pas fait la révolution?’, his friend replies, ‘Oh! pardonnez-moi, mais ils l’ont fait en *démolissant* et non en *reconstruisant*’.²³ Reconstruction of human communities following dramatic socio-political upheaval is therefore an act of environmental preservation: it is the simultaneously active and imaginative work of caring for the socio-cultural and physical environment in such a way that profitably adapts the social edifice of the past to a challenging new context.²⁴ Madame de Genlis’s ideal post-Revolutionary citizens must consequently re-negotiate, with environmental awareness, their place within a newly reconstructed social edifice: the local environment of the rural community and the emerging national environment of nineteenth-century France.

During Madame de Genlis’s lifetime France remained a predominantly agrarian, pre-industrial nation with the rural village community at its heart. As the title suggests, Peter McPhee, in *Living the French Revolution*, aims to capture the experience of tumultuous social change for the ‘nine-tenths of the population who lived on farms and in the villages and small towns of rural France’.²⁵ He suggests that despite the ‘attempts by revolutionary governments to create the bases for national unity, culminating in the *République une et indivisible* after 1792, the village and its immediate *pays* remained the fundamental spatial reference point for the great mass of new citizens’.²⁶ Indeed, others, such as Gwynne Lewis, have argued that it was the farm, rather than the factory which ‘would remain the basic unit of eighteenth-century French economic life until well into the nineteenth century’, and moreover that ‘the reality and myth of rural culture would continue to influence its socio-

²² Alicia C. Montoya, ‘Introduction: Madame de Genlis and Enlightenment Thought’, *Revue électronique de littérature française*, 7 (2013), 1-3 (p. 2).

²³ Genlis, ‘Le Malencontreux’, in *Nouveaux contes moraux et nouvelles historiques*, 3 vols (Paris: Maradan, 1802), I, 424 (original emphasis).

²⁴ This argument is embodied in the very creation of the *Maison rustique* itself as a literary artefact, as will be demonstrated through analysis of this text.

²⁵ Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

economic and socio-cultural institutions well into the twentieth century'.²⁷ Throughout Madame de Genlis's *œuvre* the reconstruction of the social edifice is founded upon a societal model which favours a decentralised system of rural communities across the French nation. They do not exist in isolation, however; according to the model she proposes, these unique communities, each with their own regional customs and traditions, form a coherent, overarching French culture which shares the ethical principles put forward in her texts. This attention to the local aligns Madame de Genlis's ecological thought with twenty-first-century models of sustainability in a variety of striking ways.

For Timothy Clark, modern-day environmental problems stem from 'structures of hierarchy and elitism in human society, geared to exploit both other people and the natural world as a source of profit', to which the solution would be 'fundamental political reform, moving towards small-scale often anarchistic societies without inbuilt institutions of injustice'.²⁸ Here, Clark questions hierarchical, socio-political structures which cannot be reconciled with the ethical foundations of an ecocritical project which values the integrity and oneness of ecological systems. Meanwhile, Andrew Dobson claims that the 'decentralization of social and political life is fundamental to the Green vision of sustainable society'.²⁹ Dobson argues that, in broad terms, 'it is only by decentralization that we can increase self-sufficiency – and self-sufficiency is vital if we are to minimize the burden of social systems on the ecosystems that support them'.³⁰ Madame de Genlis's description of Trappist monks, in the footnote to an entry on convents in her *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour* (1818), exemplifies this approach to communal living:

Ces religieux étaient au nombre de cent vingt; ils n'avaient que trente mille livres de rente; et avec ce revenu, ils achetaient tous les ans pour plus de mille écus de blé, qu'ils distribuaient aux pauvres de la campagne. En outre, ils entretenaient des familles entières dans les villages voisins, et ils recevaient plus de quatre mille hôtes par an, qu'ils nourrissaient sur le reste de leur revenu [...] Comment, avec un tel revenu, une maison de cent vingt personnes peut-elle faire ces immenses charités? C'est que ces cent vingt personnes cultivaient elles-mêmes leurs terres, leurs bois et leur jardin; ne mangeaient que des légumes à l'eau, ne buvaient point de vin, n'avaient pour chaussure ordinaire que des sabots; pour vêtements, que des robes de laine qui duraient quatre ans; pour meubles, qu'une paillasse, etc.³¹

²⁷ Gwynne Lewis, *France, 1715-1804: Power and the People* (New York: Longman Pearson, 2005), p. 8.

²⁸ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 2.

²⁹ Andrew Dobson, *The Green Reader: Essays Toward a Sustainable Society* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), p. 73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³¹ Genlis, *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour*, 2 vols (Paris: P. Mongie aîné, 1818), I, 111-112.

The monks support their own material needs as well as those of others, and so, far from the ‘institutions of injustice’ which Clark identifies as an obstacle to societal reform, they display a charitable concern for the wellbeing of every member of the community. This is a model which anticipates Edward Goldsmith’s *Blueprint for Survival* (1972). In this text, he underlines the significance of the web of relations within communities – the networks formed across and between them, which, in Madame de Genlis’s texts, represent the nation itself:

Although we believe that the small community should be the basic unit of society and that each community should be as self-sufficient and self-regulating as possible, we would like to stress that we are not proposing that they be inward-looking, self-obsessed or in any way closed to the rest of the world. Basic precepts of ecology, such as the interrelatedness of all things and the far-reaching effects of ecological processes and their disruption, should influence community decision-making, and therefore there must be an efficient and sensitive communications network between all communities.³²

The egalitarian and humanitarian aims of Madame de Genlis’s idealistic social project are closely tied to her republican values – the young King Louis-Philippe himself, under her direction, was not spared from sleeping in conditions little better than those of the Trappist monks, ‘sur des planches’.³³ Analysis of a broader selection of examples from her texts, however, exposes the challenging reality of implementing this kind of self-sustainable model on a national scale. Within their essentially egalitarian community, the self-regulatory and self-sustainable practice of the monks is ecologically balanced, whereas wider rural society was an unequal one, made up, as Noelle Plack observes, of ‘the peasantry’, ‘the clergy, nobility and bourgeois proprietors’.³⁴ McPhee’s research underlines the exploitation of the peasantry, explaining that, in the years preceding the Revolution, they ‘underwrote the culture, lifestyles and expenditure of the three pillars of power and privilege: the nobility, the Church and the monarchical State’.³⁵ Correspondingly, he also reminds us that following the Revolution, ‘despite the loss of seigneurial rights and, for *émigrés*, land, nobles remained at the pinnacle of landholding, and landholding remained the major source of wealth in

³² Edward Goldsmith, *Blueprint for Survival* (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 40.

³³ Louis-Philippe explained to Victor Hugo that it was to Madame de Genlis that he owed his hardened constitution and varied education: ‘C’est elle qui m’a habitué à coucher sur des planches. Elle m’a fait apprendre une foule de choses manuelles; je sais, grâce à elle, un peu faire tous les métiers, y compris le métier de frater. Je saigne mon homme comme Figaro. Je suis menuisier, palefrenier, maçon, forgeron. Elle était systématique et sévère. Tout petit j’en avais peur; j’étais un garçon faible, paresseux et poltron; j’avais peur des souris! Elle fit de moi un homme assez hardi et qui a du cœur... Du reste, ma sœur et moi nous aimions Mme de Genlis’, in Victor Hugo, *Choses vues* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1933), pp. 61-62.

³⁴ Noelle Plack, *Common Land, Wine and the French Revolution: Rural Society and Economy in Southern France, c.1789-1820* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), p. 27.

³⁵ McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789-1799*, p. 15.

France’.³⁶ It becomes evident that a harmonious, decentralised community can be brought about only through a redistribution of environmental resources and social reordering of the rural populace.

In order to share a mode of living comparable to the monks, all community members must first resolve tensions within social hierarchies inherited from the *ancien régime*: tensions which impede the fruitful reconciliation of nature and human society exemplified by the Trappists. In *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), Murray Bookchin, another contemporary advocate of decentralisation, describes such a process as ‘a new ecological sensibility and a new ecological society: a re-harmonization of nature and humanity through a re-harmonization of human with human’.³⁷ As this study will demonstrate, Bookchin’s process of social rebalancing is manifested throughout Madame de Genlis’s corpus, though the objective of an ecologically conscientious community is not arrived at without difficulty. Despite this, the prospect of actualising such communities in the early nineteenth century is not as outlandish as one might assume, since, as several scholars have suggested, cooperation between social groups has occurred to a certain extent.

Historians such as Lewis have emphasised the unequal though interdependent relationship existing between the elites and the masses in eighteenth-century France, with Lewis himself commenting that society at the time should be interpreted as one of ‘orders’, ‘estates’ and ‘corporations’ rather than one of ‘classes in the Marxist sense (i.e. related to changing modes of production)’, especially since ‘the imposition of any rigid division between the period before the 1750s and 1789 is fundamentally misleading’.³⁸ Indeed, rather than sudden, forceful change, McPhee’s extensive research also indicates that ‘local experience of the Revolution is best understood as a process of negotiation and confrontation with distant governments rather than simply one of more-or-less recalcitrant provincial communities being acted upon, and only occasionally lashing out in violent retribution’.³⁹ The advent of the Revolution would intensify the disintegration of social barriers, helping to further liberate citizens from socio-culturally, as well as economically constructed forms of social division.⁴⁰ It would galvanise Madame de Genlis’s ideological advancement of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 208.

³⁷ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), p. 76.

³⁸ Lewis, p. 2.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰ In *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), German philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) writes that the Revolution liberated subjects from the ‘ancient cycle of sempiternal recurrences [which] had been based upon an assumedly “natural” distinction between rich and poor’ (p. 13).

decentralised rural communities which, ideally, operate within the overarching socio-political framework of a unified French nation.

The characters populating Madame de Genlis's texts can be seen to respond positively to this continual process of socio-political negotiation. In the *Maison rustique*, for example, Volnis, a repatriated *émigré* faced with the prospect of rebuilding his home, attempts to foster a sense of fraternity within the ruined community to which he has returned: a sense of identity predicated on a shared situation. He was once the wealthy *seigneur* of the village but his property, like those of the local inhabitants, has been left in ruins. His plan for the reconstruction of both his family home, and the surrounding village, though founded upon a model of self-sufficiency reminiscent of that of the monks, reveals the tensions within the social hierarchy which must be resolved before it can be successful. Before addressing the entire community, Volnis first describes his plan for reconstruction to his wife and children, stating:

Nous avons perdu tout ce qui peut fournir au luxe; la Providence nous a conservé tout ce qui donne l'aisance. Il est vrai que nous n'en pourrons jouir que par le travail, car il faut tout refaire, et cette obligation que le ciel nous impose est un bienfait de plus; ces travaux de tout genre vous donneront une instruction solide et nécessaire; vous allez fonder avec moi votre héritage; vous allez apprendre à n'estimer que les richesses véritables; celles que nous offre l'ingénieuse agriculture. Vous, mon fils, vous me seconderez dans les soins relatifs à la culture de ces champs dévastés; et dans l'ordonnance des bâtiments qu'il faut reconstruire, vous m'aidez à conduire les ouvriers. Nous n'élèverons point de somptueux édifices, et nous n'en serons logés que plus commodément; néanmoins nous tâcherons de mettre du goût dans nos distributions, et l'industrielle économie nous fournira les moyens d'allier souvent l'agréable à l'utile, et l'élégance à la simplicité.⁴¹

By emphasising his family's more modest needs and correspondingly simple tastes, Volnis presents a model in which value is not expressed in monetary terms, but rather, is directed into recognition of the worth of both natural and human resources, in addition to the possibility of harnessing these resources in an ecologically sensitive manner. This is an attitude which can be said to foreshadow Greg Garrard's discussion of 'deep ecology' as 'recognition of intrinsic value in nature' and 'a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere'.⁴² Volnis, however, must rely upon the education he has received owing to his placement within the social hierarchy, and must share this knowledge with the community – as Madame de Genlis does through her texts – if he is to bring about measurable change. His view appears to diverge from 'deep ecology', however, in that

⁴¹ *Maison rustique*, I. 6.

⁴² Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 24.

whereas for Garrard, ‘the shift from human-centric to a nature-centered system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology’, which brings it into ‘opposition with almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion’, for Volnis, the inherent value of the natural world and the divine are inextricably linked.⁴³ The natural world, viewed as the source of all material, educational and spiritual value, also becomes the ethical foundation for reformulating an historical interdependence between the nobility and the peasant:

Oh! Combien je bénis la Providence qui, par des leçons sévères, mais utiles et bienfaisantes, m’a dessillé les yeux, et me fait enfin connaître que c’est aux champs, dans les travaux de la campagne, loin des intrigants et des ambitieux, au sein de l’innocence, de la nature et de l’amitié, qu’il faut chercher le bonheur!⁴⁴

The divine origin of nature is central to Madame de Genlis’s understanding of the natural world and thus has implications for how notions of social responsibility – and citizenship – are expressed in her texts, in addition to how post-Revolutionary communities, undergoing reconstruction, respond to the social questions of their age. Rueckert claims that environmental crisis is brought about ‘because the means by which we use the ecosphere to produce wealth are destructive of the ecosystem itself’, and that ‘human beings have broken out of the circle of life, driven not by biological need, but by social organization which they have devised to conquer nature’.⁴⁵ In recalibrating notions of ecological value in the face of crisis, Volnis confronts questions about the status of the individual not only within the local community, but also, in a nation which has declared fraternity as a core societal value and in a world where individualism and seemingly un-ethical, un-environmental, pro-industrial consumerism is growing. Volnis acknowledges his new role as both guardian and mediator of

⁴³ Ibid., p. 24. There is, however, a case to be made for an interpretation of Christian thought, which, although principally anthropocentric, can be brought in line with ‘deep ecology’ through the notion of the death of the self, which also corresponds to Arendt’s viewpoint: ‘Before the rise of the modern age it was a matter of course that quiet, actionless, and selfless contemplation of the miracle of being, or of the wonder of God’s creation, should also be the proper attitude for the scientist, whose curiosity about the particular had not yet parted company with the wonder before the general from which, according to the ancients, sprang philosophy’. See ‘The Concept of History: Between Ancient and Modern’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 50. In addition to this, Holmes Rolston III in ‘Feeding People versus Saving Nature’, in *Ethics in Practice*, ed. by Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), proposes the ‘Noah myth’ as evidence of ecological sensitivity in the Bible, ‘when nature was primordially put at peril as great as the actual threat today’. There, he says, ‘God seems more concerned about species than about the humans who have then gone so far astray. In the covenant re-established, the beasts are specifically included. “Keep them alive with you...according to their kinds” (Genesis 6. 19-20). There is something ungodly about an ethic by which the late-coming *Homo sapiens* arrogantly regards the welfare of his own species as absolute, with the welfare of all the other five million species sacrificed to that’ (p. 590). See also Madame de Genlis’s *La Religion considérée comme l’unique base du bonheur et de la véritable philosophie* (Orléans: Couret de Villeneuve, 1787).

⁴⁴ *Maison rustique*, I. 11.

⁴⁵ Rueckert, cited in Glotfelty and Fromm, p. 116.

new socio-cultural economies of value following a decisive moment of socio-political change. His sense of moral duty, tied to his conception of social responsibility, sees him attempting to redefine the historical interdependence between his own family and the inhabitants of the village:

Mes enfants, leur dit-il, je ne suis plus votre seigneur, mais je serai toujours votre ami; je ne puis vous offrir un asile dans mon château, il n'existe plus, et vos chaumières ne sont que délabrées... En attendant que vous ayez pu les relever, vous trouverez un refuge dans ma ferme, les granges de Girard pourront vous contenir tous; nous prendrons dans la ferme notre respectable pasteur, et nous tâcherons d'y loger encore les femmes enceintes et les nourrices. Je ne vous laisserai pas manquer d'ouvrage; je vais bâtir, je vais planter et défricher des champs devenues incultes, vous m'aidez dans mes travaux, je prendrai part aux vôtres, nous travaillerons avec vous au rétablissement du presbytère du village; cette terre, jadis fertilisée par nous, reprendra bientôt toute sa fécondité.⁴⁶

Volnis's words mark a turning point for the community. In ceasing to be the 'seigneur' of the village, he will be reconciled to the people as their friend, protector and educator. Andrew Schaap, in his discussion of reconciliation within societies divided by a history of political violence, explains that 'political reconciliation is initiated not by invoking an ideal image of community that should be restored, but by conceiving the present as the moment from which a future community might understand itself to have originated'.⁴⁷ Volnis does not present an idealised picture but instead underlines the moment which marks the rebuilding of the community: the people take up their work again and '[cette] terre [...] reprendra bientôt toute sa fécondité'. Acute political and economic division is gradually replaced by new forms of social division based on new economies of value, and thus, in Madame de Genlis's texts, the rural environment is concurrently a space of collective experience and of social difference. Homi K. Bhabha's thoughts on nation and culture can be usefully applied here, for, as he observes: 'it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated'.⁴⁸ Consequently, the texts which have been selected for analysis in this study are those which capture this process of negotiation between societal 'orders' and which illuminate the interrelatedness of environment, citizenship and nation in the reconstruction of ecologically sensitive communities.

⁴⁶ *Maison rustique*, II. 4.

⁴⁷ Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 149.

⁴⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 2.

PRIMARY CORPUS

Although a modern edition of the *Maison rustique* – the initial starting point of this thesis – was published by Jean-Paul Clément in 1994, no detailed study of the text has been made.⁴⁹ Like many of the hitherto unexamined instructional texts forming part of Madame de Genlis's *œuvre*, it articulates a decisive plan for the reconstruction of the social edifice through the renewal of humankind's relationship with the rural environment. It follows a pattern set out in *Les Veillées du château* (1784), an earlier and immensely popular work in which a mother composes moral tales to be read to her children every evening.⁵⁰ In the *Maison rustique* Volnis instructs his children about the process of building a rural home through a series of daily lectures which offer, as Madame de Genlis points out in her preface:

Une connaissance nette et approfondie de tous les détails économiques d'une grande maison de campagne, et des idées générales sur les divers genres de culture, en détaillant avec soin les points essentiels de ces cultures; et c'est, je crois, ce qu'on trouvera dans ce livre qui n'est point abrégé, puisque tous les articles les plus importants y sont complets.⁵¹

It contains the necessary instructions for building and furnishing a country home, complete with its own chapel, library, laboratory, *cabinet d'histoire naturelle* and a produce-yielding garden. It is this text, in particular, which encourages readers to put technical and moral precepts into practice in order to bring about a literal and figurative transformation of this home, in a dual sense, as a place of dwelling and as a place of origin: the Greek *oikos*, or household, from which such terms as 'economy', 'ecology' and 'ecocriticism' derive. The texts which have been selected for this study are consequently those which complement the *Maison rustique*, through the contribution they make to her pedagogical plan for constructing ecologically sensitive homes, be they individual dwellings or entire rural communities.

Publishing prolifically throughout her lifetime, Madame de Genlis first received literary attention for her collection of morally edifying plays, the *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes*

⁴⁹ Only three editions of the *Maison rustique* exist: by Maradan in 1810, Lecoite et Durey in 1826 and Mémoire en marge in 1994. The general catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France lists only four copies of the text. Moreover, while its main catalogue lists approximately 236 of Madame de Genlis's works, the British Library holds no copy of the *Maison rustique*.

⁵⁰ Gillian Dow reports that seven thousand copies of this work were sold in France in eight days and, given the author's popularity, this may well have been anticipated by readers at the time as it is for her fictional or novelistic work that Madame de Genlis is best known. Gillian Dow, 'The British Reception of Madame de Genlis's Writings for Children: Plays and Tales of Instruction and Delight', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (2006), 367–81.

⁵¹ *Maison rustique*, I. vii–viii.

personnes (1779 -1780).⁵² Writing in 1926, William Kerby comments that ‘it might almost be said that she was under the sway of some pedagogical demon, such need did she feel of imparting knowledge to others’, and this can be intimated from the range of material she produced for a wide audience.⁵³ It is clear that Madame de Genlis devoted herself to writing, study and education. ‘J’étais née pour écrire, pour cultiver les arts et la littérature’, she writes in her *Mémoires inédits* (1825), adding: ‘Je crois que mes études ont été utiles à la religion, par conséquent à la morale, et enfin à l’éducation’.⁵⁴ Ultimately, in shaping the education of a future king, Madame de Genlis was helping to determine the future of a nation and she used her position as ‘gouverneur’ – to which she was appointed in 1782 – as a platform from which to publish instructional texts.⁵⁵ Much of the teaching material she designed for her pupils’ lessons would be adapted and published in a variety of forms, with her *Leçons d’une gouvernante à ses élèves, ou fragment d’un journal qui a été fait pour l’éducation de M. d’Orléans* (1791) being a prominent example.⁵⁶ It was her fictional texts, however, which brought her critical acclaim. Of these, *Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l’éducation* (1782), *Les Veillées du château* (1784) and *Les Chevaliers du cygne* (1795) are amongst the best known and have remained the analytical focus of contemporary literary scholars. Her candid *Mémoires inédits*, published towards the end of her career, was also deemed by one nineteenth-century reviewer essential to everyone ‘who would understand France from 1789 to 1830’, and it has remained an object of study ever since.⁵⁷

Alongside a select few fictional texts, then, it is biographical details which have interested scholars, so much so that a lifetime’s devotion to the pen has been eclipsed by the scandal of an extramarital affair which has become the cornerstone of many critical works relating to Madame de Genlis. Her varied practical texts have been largely overlooked. Since this study considers her body of writing as a comprehensive programme of reading which

⁵² Genlis, *Théâtre à l’usage des jeunes personnes* (Paris: M. Lambert & F. J. Baudouin, 1779 -1780). This text is sometimes published under the title: *Théâtre d’éducation*.

⁵³ William Moseley Kerby, *The Educational Ideas and Activities of Madame La Comtesse De Genlis: With Special Reference to her Work Adèle et Théodore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1926), p. 6. Kerby also stated that Madame de Genlis ‘is justly entitled to be considered as a pioneer of many modern methods of teaching, and has exercised considerable influence on the development of educational theory and practice’ (p. 199).

⁵⁴ Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis: sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution Française: depuis 1756 jusqu’à nos jours*, 8 vols (Paris: Ladvocat, 1825), VII. 76.

⁵⁵ The title of *gouverneur* was a purposefully and self-consciously masculine title, proposed by the father of her pupils, Philippe d’Orléans Duke of Chartres, who was her secret lover. Evidence of the couple’s affair was brought to light in the letters published by Gaston Maugras, in *L’Idylle d’un Gouverneur* (Paris: Plon, 1904).

⁵⁶ Genlis, *Leçons d’une gouvernante à ses élèves, ou Fragment d’un journal qui a été fait pour l’éducation de M. d’Orléans* (Paris: Onfroy, 1791).

⁵⁷ *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, ed. by John Holmes Agnew and Walter Hilliard Bidwell (New York: Leavitt, Trow & Co., 1853), XXIV, p. 365.

shapes readers' conceptions of their place in the rural home – and their role as citizens inhabiting it – the texts are not presented in chronological order, but rather, thematically. Of the approximately one hundred and forty texts which form her *œuvre*, preference is shown here for those which have been overlooked by literary scholars owing to their non-fictional content – guides, manuals and reference texts – in addition to those which are often neglected for their blend of fictional narrative and practical instruction which make them difficult to categorise.

The *Maison rustique* is one such hybrid text and its significance, from an ecocritical perspective, is perhaps magnified thanks to its reliance on a literary heritage stretching back to the sixteenth century. It is this tradition which forms the basis of the overall structure, content and even part of the title of the work: a modern counterpart to Charles Estienne and Jean Liebault's immensely successful collaborative work of 1570, *L'Agriculture et maison rustique*, and the much admired *Économie générale de la campagne, ou, Nouvelle maison rustique* of Louis Liger, published much later, in 1700.⁵⁸ The century-long interlude between the publication of these works does not indicate a diminishing interest in the genre, but rather, stands testament to the persisting popularity of texts offering agricultural instruction throughout the early modern period and well into the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Madame de Genlis openly acknowledges her debt to the authors of preceding texts:

Il faut beaucoup de talent pour bien peindre les charmes de la nature, il n'en faut point pour apprendre à connaître ses travaux, quand on est guidé par les excellents ouvrages

⁵⁸ Charles Estienne, *L'Agriculture, et maison rustique de M. Charles Estienne; parachevée premièrement, puis augmentée par M. Jean Liebault* (Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1572) and Louis Liger, *Économie générale de la campagne, ou nouvelle maison rustique* (Amsterdam: Henri Desbordes, 1701). Little scholarship is to be found on these texts though Jean Cuisenier has published an architectural study commenting on such works: *La Maison rustique: logique sociale et composition architecturale* (Paris: PUF, 1991). In the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), we also find the inclusion of a reference to this genre of text under the definition of 'rustique': 'Champêtre, qui est des champs, qui appartient aux champs. *Vie rustique. Il y a un Livre qui traite du ménage des champs qu'on appelle, La Maison rustique. Il y a de certaines chansons, de certains airs, de certaines danses rustiques qui sont fort agréables*'.

⁵⁹ An abundance of later editions of both of these texts, in addition to a large number of translations into Dutch, English, German, and Italian were produced. *L'Agriculture et maison rustique* ran to at least 12 editions in French between 1564 and 1689. This brings us almost up-to-date with the publication of Liger's work, which ran to upwards of 25 editions from 1700 onwards. For further information about nineteenth-century readership of reference texts of this kind, see Martyn Lyons' *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). Lyons believes that 'in studying the peasants' encounters with print culture, we are examining the meeting of peasant civilizations with an expanding national culture' (p. 130). He describes a rapidly expanding reading public which included new groups of readers, such as workers, women, and peasants, with functional literacy becoming 'almost universal for both French men and women' by the end of the century (p. 1). In addition, he suggests that the 'advice literature on working-class reading directed workers towards certain literary genres which were considered edifying and away from others. Non-fiction was preferable by far, especially scientific manuals aimed at improving the technical expertise of artisans. The advice texts were trying to shape working-class literary culture in a way that would limit distraction and escapism, in order to develop practical talents and improve the quality of production' (p. 31).

sur l'agriculture qui ont paru sur la fin du siècle dernier et dans le commencement de celui-ci, parmi lesquels l'utile et savant Dictionnaire intitulé: *Nouveau cours complet d'agriculture, etc.*, sera toujours mis au rang des meilleurs livres.⁶⁰

Earlier works of this type could be usefully explored as a means of tracing the origins of eco-sensitive thought in early modern texts, and consequently, of the historiography of humankind's understanding of the ecological effects of human interaction with the environment. By equipping the reader with the necessary skills to cope with seasonal variation, changes in weather and climate, unexpected crises such as poor harvests and outbreaks of disease amongst animals, the authors specialising in this genre promoted independence, self-sustainability and practical knowledge which first-hand experience could subsequently improve.

Madame de Genlis's own version of the *Maison rustique* was commissioned for the children of the Queen of Naples, the spouse of Joseph Bonaparte. Reflecting on her connection to the House of Bonaparte, and her influential role in producing texts which can be said to reflect the socio-cultural aspirations of the Empire, in her *Mémoires inédits* she states: 'Je crois que je donnai alors ma *Maison rustique*, l'un des ouvrages les plus utiles que j'aie fait pour les jeunes personnes, et qui m'a coûté, pendant un an, les recherches les plus fatigantes'.⁶¹ The readers of Madame de Genlis's own adaptation, regardless of their social background, could now also be prepared to face the uncertainties of rural life with the added advantage of moral lessons conveyed through the fictional narrative. In addition, it is possible to identify other literary influences which further contribute to a sense of Madame de

⁶⁰ *Maison rustique*, I. x. Madame de Genlis also notes: 'J'ai lu, outre cet estimable et grand ouvrage, les ouvrages particuliers de M. Parmentier, la dernière *Maison rustique*, en 3 vol. in-4°, ainsi que la *Petite Maison Rustique*, en 2 vol. in-8°; le *Cours d'agriculture pratique*, par M. Pfluguer, 2 vol. in-8°; le *Traité des abeilles, et celui des vers à soie*, par M. de Lalauze; *l'Art d'empailler les oiseaux*; plusieurs *Mémoires de la société médicale d'émulation*, mémoires à la fois curieux, instructifs et intéressants; beaucoup d'articles du dictionnaire de Bomare, et des dictionnaires de pharmacie de MM. Rivet et Morellot. En livres de médecine, j'ai lu les recettes de madame Fouquet, les ouvrages de Tissot, d'Herenschwand, et la *Thérapeutique de M. Alibert*', *Maison rustique* (I. xi-xii).

⁶¹ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 272. Noting the significance of the author's relationship with Napoleon Bonaparte, Édouard Quesnet, in the introduction to his 1885 edition of the author's *De l'esprit des étiquettes de l'ancienne cour et des usages du monde de ce temps* (Rennes: H. Callière, 1885), explains that the Emperor 'voulut utiliser la connaissance qu'avait Madame de Genlis de l'étiquette et des anciens usages de la Cour de Versailles quand il songea à les rétablir dans son entourage' (pp. xiii-xiv). In return, he notes that the Emperor provided her with 'une pension de 6,000 francs et un logement à la Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal', a fact substantiated by the *Mémoires*. Additionally, Madame de Genlis 'obtint une autre pension de 3,000 francs de la reine de Naples, femme de Joseph Bonaparte', presumably for the creation of texts such as the *Maison rustique*, Ibid. (pp. xiii-xiv). However, it is of significance that, in the *Mémoires inédits*, she records having turned down the opportunity to become governess to the children of Queen Joseph: 'je sentis que la personne qui avait élevé trois princes et une princesse de la maison de Bourbon, ne devait pas élever des enfants de la famille impériale de Bonaparte; d'ailleurs je recevais une pension de l'empereur, il était mon bienfaiteur, et le premier et le seul que j'aie eu parmi les souverains' (V. 270).

Genlis's engagement with and adaptation of popular texts: these were moral lessons deemed by the author more suitable than those proffered by Rousseau through the example of Clarens in his *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) for instance.⁶² As Isabelle Brouard-Arends writes:

La communauté de Clarens, espace géographique et social, en retrait des mondanités parisiennes, fascine toujours les consciences et il est certain que Madame de Genlis reprend à son compte cette source romanesque lorsqu'elle situe l'écriture des lettres dans une géographie languedocienne.⁶³

Unlike her well-known and widely examined *Adèle et Théodore*, an epistolary novel which also proposes a system of education carried out in a rural setting and which is often compared with Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), Madame de Genlis's *Maison rustique* is noteworthy as an example of a text which can be read specifically as one which aims to facilitate the post-Revolutionary reconstruction of harmonious rural communities. The present study, then, focuses on eco-sensitive thought in the texts of an author who, in response to extreme social or ecological crisis, was able to synthesise a wealth of information, both old and new, and present this in a way that was comprehensive and accessible to her readership.

The *Botanique historique et littéraire*, a work 'qui exigeait d'immenses recherches', was published in the same year as the *Maison rustique*, and designed to be read alongside it.⁶⁴ It offers cultural interpretation of the natural world with which readers would have come to familiarise themselves in the *Maison rustique*. The educational advantages of the study of botany had been long understood and Madame de Genlis was undoubtedly aware of texts such as Rousseau's *Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique* (1771 – 1773), which would later be published as the *Botanique des enfants* (1803).⁶⁵ However, unlike Rousseau's work, the *Botanique historique et littéraire* is much broader in terms of its educational aims. The text, in the author's own words, 'n'a rien de scientifique'; instead, each individual entry includes a brief description of the plant under consideration, focusing on aspects of etymology, symbolism and its use in literature, as well as anecdotes about its use by significant figures in history.⁶⁶ Discussing her interest in the subject matter, Madame de Genlis explains:

⁶² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Paris: Charpentier, 1845)

⁶³ Isabelle Brouard-Arends, 'Adèle et Théodore ou Lettres sur l'éducation de Madame de Genlis, une proposition au féminin pour le modèle éducatif des Lumières?' in *Genre et éducation: former, se former, être formée au féminin*, ed. by Bernard Bodinier et al. (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2009) p. 299.

⁶⁴ *Botanique historique et littéraire*, I. i.

⁶⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres élémentaires sur la Botanique* (1771-1773). I am using Poinçot's 1789 edition. See also his *Botanique des Enfants* (Paris: Baudouin, 1803).

⁶⁶ Genlis, *Botanique*, I. iii.

Mon goût pour les plantes m'a fait penser qu'il était curieux d'examiner quel rôle avaient pu jouer les végétaux, ces êtres presque animés, sur la surface de cette terre qu'ils embellissent, et j'ai trouvé quelque chose d'agréable dans l'idée d'attacher un souvenir à presque toutes les fleurs.⁶⁷

This idea is central to understanding Madame de Genlis's consideration of the natural world not only as a resource catering to humankind's physical needs, but also as a signifier of culturally constructed social and literary values, in addition to being 'presqu'animé', that is, possessing an intrinsic aesthetic, ethical, cultural, and ultimately ecological, value. Her recognition of the plants' worth is in keeping with Clark's plea for 'a drastic change in human self-understanding: one should see oneself not as an atomistic individual engaged in the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as part of a greater living identity'.⁶⁸ Like the *Maison rustique*, the *Botanique* offers a unique perspective on the natural world, carrying with it specific socio-cultural implications about the relationship between humankind and the rural environment in the early nineteenth century. From this point of view, analysis of the *Botanique* draws attention to what Garrard describes as the fundamental challenge for ecocritics: 'to keep one eye on the way in which "nature" is always in some ways culturally constructed and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse'.⁶⁹ Lawrence Buell calls this 'a myth of mutual constructionism: of physical environment (both natural and human built) shaping in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it'.⁷⁰ This text, alongside the *Maison rustique*, allows Madame de Genlis to become the literary arbitrator of this mutual constructionsim, providing her readers with the textual resources to learn about cultivating the natural world and, subsequently, to imbue nature with cultural value.

The *Botanique* is similar in its aim to the *Herbier moral* (1799), another key text in this study. An anthology of 'apologues', or short fables, it also serves to emphasise the literary or cultural significance of plants. It is presented by Madame de Genlis as a means of reinforcing the beneficial moral lessons of botany: 'l'idée de vivifier pour ainsi dire la *Botanique* en la présentant en apologues', and ultimately forming 'un énorme recueil aussi instructif qu'original et agréable'.⁷¹ As in both the *Maison rustique* and the *Botanique*, the *Herbier*

⁶⁷ Ibid., I. i.

⁶⁸ Clark, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Garrard, p. 10

⁷⁰ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 6.

⁷¹ Genlis, *Herbier moral ou recueil de fables nouvelles et autres poésies fugitives* (Hamburg: Pierre Chateaneuf, 1799), p. ix. Here the word 'botanique' is italicised by Madame de Genlis in order to stress the

moral is intended to breathe new life into a familiar genre by incorporating new discoveries in the natural world into useful moral lessons:

En général il me semble que depuis La Fontaine, on n'a pas assez profité pour ce genre, des connaissances si répandues en histoire naturelle et en botanique. Que d'animaux nouvellement connus la girafe, les gerboises, les sarigues, le pécari etc. qui par la singularité de leur conformation, et par leurs mœurs fourniraient d'excellents sujets de fables et quelle multitude de plantes extraordinaires n'a-t-on pas découvert dans ce siècle!⁷²

Her intention is not, however, to idealise or domesticate the natural world in such a way that fails to acknowledge the frequently savage, or untamed, aspects of nature. She explains, for example, that 'les sujets tirés de l'histoire des animaux, présentent nécessairement des tableaux révoltants' which she deems unsuitable for young readers. To better epitomise this, she cites:

le loup dévorant l'innocent agneau, le vautour se précipitant sur la colombe, la tyrannie et la cruauté du lion, la férocité du tigre, toutes ces descriptions offrent des images atroces et dégoûtantes, qui ne sont bonnes que pour ceux qui ont le malheur de vivre depuis longtemps parmi les hommes!⁷³

By contrast, she notes that apologues drawn from the 'règne végétal' inspire subjects better suited to the moral education of young readers. It is, in addition, a more appropriate source of contemplation for those who assume the socio-cultural responsibility of translating the natural into a readable, moral form: 'les fleurs ont des caractères distinctifs, fixés surtout par leurs propriétés bonnes ou mauvaises; le poète doit les étudier, les connaître, y conformer le plan de sa fiction'.⁷⁴ The *Herbier moral* provides further useful material for the investigation of ecological sensitivity, its implications for socio-cultural production and ethical approaches to the rural environment in Madame de Genlis's writing.

Selected tales from the *Nouveaux contes moraux et nouvelles historiques* (1802) help to illustrate further the emergence of an ecologically sensitive relationship between humankind and nature, and the social tensions which accompany this development in the early nineteenth century. A key example is 'Le Malencontreux ou Mémoires d'un émigré pour servir à l'Histoire de la Révolution', a tale which relates the attempts of Kerkalis, a

importance of botany as an educational discipline. It does not refer to the *Botanique historique et littéraire*, which was published afterwards.

⁷² Ibid., pp. ix-x.

⁷³ Ibid., p. x.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. x – xi.

baron, to regain control of his property and to reassert his social standing in post-Revolutionary France. He is depicted as a character who struggles to place himself within the new social hierarchy of the early nineteenth-century rural environment. His misfortune begins when he leaves Brittany for Bordeaux following the death of his uncle. Upon returning home he discovers that his property and land have been confiscated ‘parce qu’on avait pris mon voyage pour une émigration’ and that he has been declared an *émigré*, despite his having not left France.⁷⁵ He is threatened with the scaffold, forced to flee and, like Volnis in the *Maison rustique*, he is inspired to act on the impulse to renovate the social edifice. He feels a sense of social responsibility towards his fellow citizens, though this motivation has its origins in a privileged worldview, and his many attempts to reconstruct rural society are exploitative owing to his lack of a socially inclusive perspective. He believes that he has a duty to his late father who, he assures us, ‘n’avait qu’un goût, celui de l’agriculture, et qu’une occupation, celle de défricher des terrains incultes’ and who ‘acheta des champs immenses de bruyères, les cultiva avec succès, s’enrichit honorablement, et me laissa une fortune considérable’.⁷⁶ By profiting from his knowledge of agriculture, he aims both to restore his wealth and to revitalise the barren landscape: ‘j’en contemplais avec plaisir l’immense étendue, en songeant qu’il m’était peut-être réservé de vivifier ce triste désert’.⁷⁷ Instead of heather, shrubs and undergrowth, he says, ‘je me représentais des champs fertiles, des cultures variées. Mon imagination plaçait de distance en distance des hameaux et des villages; je croyais voir ma colonie naissante prospérer autour de moi, travailler avec ardeur, et m’enrichir en me bénissant’.⁷⁸ Unlike Volnis’s benevolent, ecologically sensitive approach, therefore, Kerkalis portrays himself as a coloniser of post-Revolutionary France. The tales from this collection are thus essential to understanding social responsibility in Madame de Genlis’s texts and the often dangerous slippage between the growth of egalitarian, ecologically balanced communities and the exploitation of the peasantry in the ideological movement towards establishing ideal rural communities.

Analysis of the aforementioned texts, alongside a selection of primarily practical or non-fictional works, will follow her ideological blueprint of transition over almost forty years, from *Les Veillées du château* (1784) to her *Veillées de la chaumière* (1823).⁷⁹ This will include reference to the *Catéchisme de morale* (1785), which outlines the citizen’s

⁷⁵ Genlis, ‘Malencontreux ou mémoires d’un émigré’, in *Nouveaux contes moraux, et nouvelles historiques*, 3 vols (Paris: Maradan, 1802).

⁷⁶ Ibid., II. 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., II. 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid., II. 5.

⁷⁹ Genlis, *Les Veillées de la chaumière* (Paris: Lecointe et Durey, 1823).

societal obligations, the *Manuel du voyageur* (1798), a phrase book which offers practical advice to the *émigré*, her *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple* (1791) and *Projet d'une école rurale pour l'éducation des filles* (1801) which demonstrate her commitment to improving the education of poor members of society, and her *Étude du cœur humain suivie des Cinq premières semaines d'un journal écrit sur les Pyrénées* (1805), a series of reflective essays on subjects such as the idea of 'natural man', savages, animals and the perfectibility of humankind.⁸⁰ In addition to this, the *Suite de souvenirs de Félicie L**** (1807) offers anecdotes about Madame de Genlis's experience of nature through travel, while *Les Bergères de Madian, ou La Jeunesse de Moïse* (1812), is a poetic depiction of the natural world through the eyes of the biblical figure, Moses.⁸¹ The *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour* (1818) is a useful source of reference which sheds light on her social ideology.⁸² This is yet another text which underlines the complex relationship which existed between Madame de Genlis and the *philosophes*, especially since it was written in order to counterbalance the content of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. In her entry on the *Encyclopédie* in her *Dictionnaire critique*, which she claims to have read twice, she writes:

La grande entreprise, le grand titre de gloire du dix-huitième siècle, c'est l'*Encyclopédie*! Il est certain que c'est l'ouvrage le plus volumineux qu'ait jamais entrepris; mais est-il bien fait? Non. A-t-il été utile? Au contraire. Y trouve-t-on au moins des articles faits avec des talents supérieurs? Pas un seul. Mais on en pourrait citer une énorme quantité de pernicieux et d'exécrables, et en outre un nombre infini d'absurdes et de ridicules. [...] Je la hais, parce que je l'ai lue deux fois. Deux fois! Comment relit-on une seconde fois un tel ouvrage que l'on trouvait si méprisable? Afin de se mettre en état d'en combattre les opinions, les principes, les sentiments.⁸³

This text is thus useful as a means of contextualising such 'opinions', 'principles' and 'sentiments' and understanding the motives behind Madame de Genlis's moral writings. Finally, *Les Jeux champêtres des enfants* (1821) advocates self-led learning through children's direct engagement with nature and the *Manuel de la jeune femme, guide complet de la maîtresse de maison* (1829) is noteworthy as one of the last of her texts published

⁸⁰ Genlis, *Catéchisme de morale, contenant les devoirs de l'homme et du citoyen de quelque religion et de quelque nature qu'il soit* (Dresden: Frères Walther, 1785), *Manuel du voyageur, ou Recueil des dialogues contenant les expressions les plus usitées en voyage et dans des différents circonstances de la vie* (Berlin, 1798), *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple* (Paris: Onfroy, 1791), *Projet d'une école rurale pour l'éducation des filles* (Paris: Maradan, 1801), *Étude du cœur humain suivie des Cinq premières semaines d'un journal écrit sur les Pyrénées* (Paris: Maradan, 1805).

⁸¹ Genlis, *Suite de souvenirs de Félicie L**** (Paris: Maradan, 1807), *Les Bergères de Madian, ou La Jeunesse de Moïse* (Paris: Galignani, 1812).

⁸² Genlis, *Les Jeux champêtres des enfants, et De l'île des monstres* (Paris: A. Marc, 1821), *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour*, 2 vols (Paris: P. Mongie aîné, 1818).

⁸³ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 169-170.

during her lifetime.⁸⁴ Prosaic and simple, it guides its female reader through a variety of topics, such as the general management of the household and servants, cookery and even pregnancy. Much more direct and less concerned with moral questions, this text shows how the content and presentation of Madame de Genlis's texts on life in the rural home developed over time. Investigation of the primary corpus outlined in this introduction demonstrates that the author's instructional material, her texts of non-fiction especially, is even richer and more complex than initial inquiries have suggested. Since these texts have been almost absent from work on Madame de Genlis thus far, the implications of her wider societal project have yet to be explored, and it is this gap in the scholarship that the present study seeks to address.

ÉTAT PRÉSENT

Madame de Genlis has been described by Montoya as a figure of Enlightenment thinking whose popularity 'equalled or even surpassed that of her contemporaries'.⁸⁵ Gabriel de Broglie, whose biography *Madame de Genlis* (1985) is considered to be the definitive study of her life, observes of this author who lived under eleven different political regimes during her eighty-four years:

Par son expérience, ses écrits, sa curiosité et son talent, nul n'était plus qualifié qu'elle pour caractériser la transformation sociale qui se déroulait sous ses yeux, comprendre et décrire le passage de la société d'Ancien Régime à celle du XIX^e siècle.⁸⁶

Her story is one of personal struggle and loss, and above all, of survival, for which she depended upon her varied education and experience. Indeed, in reply to a remark made by the celebrated Irish author, Lady Morgan, in reference to Madame de Genlis's ability to re-string and tune her own harp, the author is reported to have said 'Oh! This is nothing. What I pride myself on, is knowing twenty trades, by all of which I could earn my bread'.⁸⁷ Nineteenth-century novelist Julia Kavanagh's description of Madame de Genlis as an author 'who knew the world so well – the French world especially – who had seen life under all its aspects; who had been poor, rich, a countess, the companion of princes, an authoress, an exile, a fugitive;

⁸⁴ Genlis, *Manuel de la jeune femme, guide complet de la maîtresse de maison* (Paris: Charles-Béchet, 1829).

⁸⁵ Alicia C. Montoya, 'Introduction: Madame de Genlis and Enlightenment Thought', p. 1.

⁸⁶ Gabriel Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1985), p. 316. This text was reprinted in 2001.

⁸⁷ Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), *France*, 2 vols (London: James Eastburn & Co., 1817), p. 387. As one of Madame de Genlis's contemporaries, Lady Morgan also incorporated many similar themes into her writing. The details of the meeting between these women is also recorded in the *Mémoires inédits*.

who had worked and written for her bread, and been compelled to mingle in every society', is justly precise.⁸⁸ It was this experience, and the ability to adapt, which made her a uniquely qualified commentator on life in the years leading up to the Revolution, and in the transition from Revolution to Empire. Upon returning to France following a period of almost eight years in exile, her continued literary output maintained her reputation and, through perseverance and an indomitable spirit, she succeeded in obtaining a pension from Napoleon. As de Broglie further explains:

Elle s'adapta, s'acharna, mit à profit sa science de la société, les ressources de son esprit, sa facilité d'écrire et réussit à reconquérir en peu de temps sinon une fortune, ni une tranquillité, du moins une célébrité beaucoup plus étendue que celle qu'elle avait jamais connue.⁸⁹

Despite this, her corpus has received comparatively little scholarly attention in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval suggests in her *Bibliographie des écrivains français* (1996), however, that the success of Madame de Genlis's literary career, during her lifetime, can be measured by three criteria: the number of editions and re-editions of her works, the number of translations, and the number of nineteenth-century works which were inspired by her texts.⁹⁰

Plagnol-Diéval lists at least 678 titles relating to Madame de Genlis and her writing, and a further thirty-two critical studies are listed in Otto Klapp's *Bibliographie*, up to 1999.⁹¹ The *Modern Languages Association International Bibliography* lists 91 entries with 'Genlis' as a keyword in the title, dating from 1933 to 2013. The majority of the listed works are articles, with only four monographs appearing: Jean Harmand's largely descriptive text – focused on reputation – *Mme de Genlis, sa vie intime et politique* (1912), Violet Wyndham's broad biographical study *Madame de Genlis* (1958), Alice M. Laborde's brief but comprehensive view of her life and works *L'Œuvre de Madame de Genlis* (1966), and Machteld de Poortere's comparative assessment of her ideology in *Les Idées philosophiques et littéraires de Mme de Staël et de Mme de Genlis* (2004).⁹² Denise Yim's *An Early*

⁸⁸ Julia Kavanagh, *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*, 2 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), II, p. 87.

⁸⁹ Broglie, p. 313.

⁹⁰ *Bibliographie des écrivains français* (Paris and Rome: Memini, 1996), p. 126. Plagnol-Diéval herself has contributed at least eight articles on Madame de Genlis between 1992 and 2007, which focus on her reputation, her theatre, as well as the themes of virtue and morality in her works, and her novels.

⁹¹ Otto Klapp, *Bibliographie der französischen Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1956-1999).

⁹² Jean Harmand, *Mme de Genlis, sa vie intime et politique* (Paris: Perrin, 1912), Violet Wyndham, *Madame de Genlis* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1958), Alice M. Laborde, *L'Œuvre de Madame de Genlis* (Paris:

Nineteenth-Century Correspondence between Two Friends: The Unpublished Letters of Madame de Genlis to her English Admirer Margaret Chinnery (2003), though not listed in the MLA bibliography, sheds further light on the more intimate, personal details of Madame de Genlis's life and underlines the far-reaching, international influence of her writing.⁹³

Research hitherto undertaken can be divided into three main categories: biographical studies, consideration of Madame de Genlis's *œuvre* in relation to women's studies or women's writing, and, perhaps most frequent of all, works analysing the role of education in her fiction, led by studies such as François Bessire and Martine Reid's edited collection of essays *Madame de Genlis: littérature et éducation* (2008).⁹⁴ In particular, the pedagogical dimensions of her fiction, in so far as it relates to the development of children, have been widely investigated, though it must be stressed that few scholars have examined the practical, instructional texts. *Adèle et Théodore* is the text which has been most widely treated and it forms the basis for the majority of studies.⁹⁵ Julia V. Douthwaite, for example, in *The Wild Girl, The Natural Man, and The Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (2002) shows the eighteenth-century fascination with so-called 'wild' or 'feral' children as a means of exploring ideas about the perfectibility of humankind.⁹⁶ She rejects the notion of intrinsic value in nature in Madame de Genlis's texts, and the idea that the natural world is specifically chosen as a formative setting for the education of the children in *Adèle et Théodore*, for example, viewing the text as a 'highly stylized, manipulative program that resembles nothing so much as the ultimate dream of a despotism run by initiates

Nizet, 1966), Machteld de Poortere, *Les Idées philosophiques et littéraires de Mme de Staël et de Mme de Genlis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁹³ Denise Yim, *The Unpublished Correspondence of Mme de Genlis and Margaret Chinnery and Related Documents in the Chinnery Family Papers* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003). See also her article, 'An Early Nineteenth-Century Correspondence Between Two Friends: The Unpublished Letters of Madame de Genlis to Her English Admirer Margaret Chinnery', *Australian Journal of French studies*, 35 (1998), 308-32.

⁹⁴ *Madame de Genlis, littérature et éducation*, ed. François Bessire and Martine Reid (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008). The studies relating to women's writing include: Yaël Schlick's 'Beyond the Boundaries: Staël, Genlis, and the Impossible "Femme Célèbre"', *Symposium*, 50-51 (1996), 50-63, Suellen Diaconoff, 'Feminized Virtue: Politics and Poetics of New Pedagogy for Women', *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 46 (1997), 121-36, Jeanne Goldin, 'Femme-auteur et réflexivité: Mme de Genlis', in *Masculin/Féminin: Le XIX^e siècle à l'épreuve du genre*, ed. by Chantal Bertrand-Jennings (Toronto, Centre d'études du XIX^e siècle ed. by Joseph-Sablé, 1999), 41-71, Isabelle Brouard-Arends, 'Trajectoires de femmes, éthique et projet auctorial, Mme de Lambert, Mme d'Épinay, Mme de Genlis', *Dix huitième siècle*, 36 (2004), 189-96.

⁹⁵ A recent edition of this text was published by Isabelle Brouard-Arends in 2006 by Presses Universitaires de Rennes. Gillian Dow has also edited an English translation: *Adelaide and Theodore* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007).

⁹⁶ Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, The Natural Man, and The Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

of an “enlightened” social control’.⁹⁷ She further describes the work as an example of ‘High Enlightenment pedagogy in its strenuous promotion of human perfectibility and in its intolerance towards human weakness’.⁹⁸ In proposing an ecocritical approach, the present study not only highlights the significance of expanding the primary corpus as a means of evaluating Douthwaite’s claims, but also views ‘social control’ as a complex, though ultimately, ecologically sensitive response to the historical context.

Drawing on similar themes, Machteld de Poortere, in *Les Idées philosophiques et littéraires de Mme de Staël et de Mme de Genlis* (2004), outlines the mixed reactions of both writers to the Revolution. She presents Madame de Genlis as ‘aristocrate d’origine, [qui] était cependant partagée entre la fidélité à sa classe privilégiée et son sens moral qui demandait plus de justice’.⁹⁹ De Poortere further adds that Madame de Genlis ‘semble vouloir réhabiliter le comportement des Français pendant la Révolution. Tout se passe comme si chaque action héroïque venait équilibrer chaque atrocité commise’.¹⁰⁰ While this is certainly a valid idea, examination through an ecocritical lens brings our attention to the many complicated social tensions which arise between the notion of the individual and the social, or in other words, suggests that social harmony can only be achieved where humankind is reconciled both with itself and with the surrounding environment. Touching on one of these themes, in an article examining Genlis’s historical novels, Jennifer Birkett concludes that they display a disproportionate respect for the existing social order:

Though her writings on education pay lip-service to individuality, and urge members of both sexes and classes to fulfil their physical and intellectual potential, that potential is always expressed within the existing social hierarchy and involves nothing more than the better performance of an allotted role.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile Bonnie Arden Robb in *Félicité de Genlis: Motherhood in the Margins* (2008) seeks to show that in works such as *Adèle et Théodore*, ‘the performance is a creative, not just an allotted, process’.¹⁰² These critical studies, which focus on Madame de Genlis’s fictional texts, do not take into consideration, however, the broader significance of Madame

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 149. She writes: ‘Although Genlis’s novels contains bucolic scenes of grateful peasants and healthy children enjoying the outdoors, I absolutely disagree with Gilbert Psy’s claim that the educational setting of *Adèle et Théodore* is nature, or that its goal is to “prepare the regeneration of the species, in conformity with the myth of innocence popularized by the eloquence of Rousseau”’, *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

⁹⁹ De Poortere, *Les Idées philosophiques et littéraires de Mme de Staël et de Mme de Genlis*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Birkett, ‘Madame de Genlis: The New Men and the Old Eve’, *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, 42 (1998), 154-55.

¹⁰² Bonnie Arden Robb, *Félicité de Genlis, Motherhood in the Margins* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 254.

de Genlis's overarching societal project, which stresses the individual's duties as a socially responsible citizen, and as a Christian, acting for the good of the wider, inclusive and progressive, community.

Robb's *Félicité de Genlis: Motherhood in the Margins* explores the author's lived experience of motherhood in addition to her textual portrayals of mothers. Robb depicts a series of 'models of motherhood', which represent the role of the mother defined by different types of nurturing figures, corresponding to different characters in Madame de Genlis's texts and throughout various periods in her life. These include the 'biological mother', 'stage mother', 'adoptive mother' and 'musical matriarch'. Robb acknowledges that Madame de Genlis's 'many roles were reflected in and mediated by her writing', although in her view, 'the maternal role, was, however, primary, informing or at least inflecting the others'.¹⁰³ She presents Madame de Genlis's experience of motherhood as 'not only biological, but also transferable, cooperative and negotiable; not only domestic, but social'.¹⁰⁴ This thesis, instead, considers Robb's interpretation as an important fragment of a fractured whole: it extends her interpretation of the so-called biological, transferable, cooperative and negotiable aspects of the maternal role into the wider social or ecological realm. It is an approach which looks beyond the role of the mother to acknowledge the importance of each member of an ecologically balanced society. It thus considers the significance of the wider rural community to assess Madame de Genlis's commitment to encouraging the development of ecologically sensitive citizens.

As Bookchin observes, 'the emergence of society is a *natural* fact that has its origins in the biology of human socialization', and consequently, society emerges 'in the form of families, bands, tribes, or more complex types of human intercourse', having its source 'in paternal relationships, particularly mother and child bonding'.¹⁰⁵ As we have seen in the *Maison rustique*, Volnis is a father who takes on the role of educating his children and who, in addition, invokes a biblical analogy to compare his family's pre- and post-Revolutionary attitude towards rural living with that of his ancestral fathers: 'Ici nous étions comme nos premiers pères, entourés de toutes les richesses de la création... les jardins ravissants d'Eden ont disparu et nous voilà sur une terre aride qu'il faut défricher'.¹⁰⁶ The ecocritical lens draws out the 'ecological' or societal aspect of Madame de Genlis's texts in its entirety, and looks

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Bookchin, *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, ed. by Janet Biehl (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 47 (original emphasis).

¹⁰⁶ *Maison rustique*, I. 13 (my emphasis).

‘beyond a mere reproductive group towards institutionalized human relationships’ which form ‘a clearly structured social order’.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, it is not gender that is important, but rather, the relationship cultivated between members of the species with one another and with the surrounding environment. This thesis enlarges the debate on Madame de Genlis’s social and political ideology and her placement within the intellectual climate of post-Revolutionary France.¹⁰⁸

Very recent scholarship has kindled a renewed interest in this aspect of her work. The most recent study to have been devoted to Madame de Genlis is a collection of articles, published in 2013, in a special edition of the *Revue Électronique de Littérature Française*. Montoya’s introduction to the issue confirms that ‘scholarship until present has done no more than scratch the surface’ of her work, ‘concentrating on only her two or three most well-known titles’.¹⁰⁹ She outlines the scope of the project as a means of recognising the contradictions in Madame de Genlis’s work and considering her ‘not so much as a critic of Enlightenment or an author on the margins of the Enlightenment mainstream, but as a particular kind of “critic from within”’.¹¹⁰ The nine essays in the collection explore Madame de Genlis’s engagement with Enlightenment debates, particularly those which encompass notions of virtue, pedagogy and political power, concluding that ‘she was not the insipid moralist her critics held her to be but in fact participated in the major societal debates of her day’.¹¹¹ Carolina Armenteros, for example, in ‘The Political Thought of Madame de Genlis: Rousseau’s Royalist Legacy’ discusses the influence of Rousseau on her writing, notable in *Adèle et Théodore* which she describes as her ‘*magnum opus*’ and as ‘the education of a boy and girl, with the aim not only of forging perfected men and women, but also of evoking an Arcadian political society’.¹¹² She discusses ‘the harmonious society of Lagaraye’ where the protagonists ‘take their children to witness human relations at their peak’ – a philanthropic community consisting of manufacturing industries that employ the former poor, in addition to the fertile fields of the country setting – which features in the text as ‘the sort of republic that the well-educated and spiritually superior can construct for the common benefit, the political

¹⁰⁷ *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ This is also in keeping with recent studies on the historiography of the historical context – on the environment and Revolution – in works such as McPhee’s *Living the French Revolution* and ‘The Misguided Greed of Peasants? Popular Attitudes to the Environment in the Revolution of 1789’, in *French Historical Studies*, 24 (2001), 247–69.

¹⁰⁹ Montoya, ‘Introduction’, *Revue Electronique de Littérature Française*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹² Carolina Armenteros, ‘The Political Thought of Madame de Genlis: Rousseau’s Royalist Legacy’, *Revue Electronique de Littérature Française*, 7 (2013), 45–70 (p. 47).

telos of Genlis's entire pedagogical project'.¹¹³ The present study expands such thinking to accommodate a diverse range of Madame de Genlis's texts, in order to give a more nuanced analysis of the moral, ethical and political dimensions of idealised rural communities and of the citizens who inhabit them. It also highlights the need to examine the author's work more closely in the context of her contemporaries, and in particular, the *philosophes*.

In recent years, scholars such as Armenteros, Brouard-Arends and Magdi Wahba have begun to shed light on the influence of Rousseau's work on Madame de Genlis – an influence tempered by the author's own staunch moral beliefs, which instilled in her a desire to set his work to rights by re-interpreting and even re-writing them. As Wahba explains in 'Madame de Genlis in England', 'while adopting the paraphernalia of Rousseau's educational methods, [Madame de Genlis] attacked the principles of Rousseau, as it were, on his own grounds'.¹¹⁴ The relationship between Madame de Genlis and Rousseau was both a complex and interesting one, deserving of much greater exploration than that which has been undertaken in scholarship thus far. Wahba, for example, delineates the success of Madame de Genlis's writings which, in her words, 'were welcomed in England with an enthusiasm which almost eclipsed the reception given to Voltaire and Rousseau'.¹¹⁵ Wahba suggests that the reasons for this popularity, although 'difficult to assess' can be partly attributed to the ideological differences between Madame de Genlis and these two literary figures, the latter's texts being more suited to the British readership's taste.¹¹⁶ In her *Mémoires inédits* Madame de Genlis describes the unusual circumstances of her first encounter with Rousseau, their subsequent friendship and their later irreparable quarrel.¹¹⁷ According to her account, Rousseau himself had cautioned her against reading his *Émile* – considering her too young at eighteen – although he shared with her the manner in which he had composed *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*.¹¹⁸ She would, in later years, perceive his works to be lacking in morality and a threat to Catholicism. While regarding him to be a talented writer, he was nevertheless, in her eyes, an 'auteur sans principes' – a point she makes clear in the preface to *Adèle et Théodore*.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Magdi Wahba, 'Madame de Genlis in England', *Comparative Literature*, 13(1961), 221-238 (p. 223).

¹¹⁵ Wahba, p. 223.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 223.

¹¹⁷ See the *Mémoires inédits*, II, 1-19. The quarrel between Madame de Genlis and Rousseau is also recorded in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Lives of the Most Eminent French Writers*, II (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), p. 177-178.

¹¹⁸ In the *Mémoires inédits* she writes, 'il me dit que ses ouvrages n'étaient pas faits pour mon âge; mais que je ferais bien de lire *Émile* dans quelques années. Il nous parla beaucoup de la manière dont il avait composé la *Nouvelle Héloïse*' (II, 9).

¹¹⁹ *Adèle et Théodore*, p. iv. In this same text she describes his *Confessions* as an 'ouvrage qui flétrit à jamais la mémoire de Rousseau', *ibid.*

From this perspective, consideration of the overlapping didacticism and the preference for natural settings in the work of both writers presents an opportunity not only to draw attention to lesser known similarities in the authors' respective works – the *Maison rustique* and the comparison that might be drawn with Rousseau's Clarens in *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* for example – but also, to recognise Madame de Genlis's importance as a writer engaging with contemporary debates.

METHODOLOGY AND CHAPTER OUTLINES

The ecocritical lens is one through which the interrelatedness of the human and the non-human is magnified and, to borrow Robert Kirkham's phrase from his essay in *The Ecological Community: Environmental Challenges for Philosophy, Politics and Morality* (1997): 'the imperative of relatedness thinking is to re-personalize, re-sacralize and re-spiritualize the world'.¹²⁰ While for Madame de Genlis, 'à la campagne, tout porte aux réflexions les plus douces et salutaires; on se rapproche de Dieu, en se rapprochant de la nature, en contemplant ses ouvrages', the ecocritical approach also allows for an interpretation of secular sacredness, and the notion of spirituality as aesthetic care, which promotes a kind of ecological sensitivity in keeping with the spirit of Enlightenment or humanitarian philosophy.¹²¹ Contemporary critics Walter and Dorothy Schwarz insist that, 'if we are to move from partial, fragmented, compartmentalized living towards completeness and holistic living, we have to put back what our dominant industrial-materialist-scientific world view leaves out'.¹²² For them, 'the spiritual', contextualised in terms of the environment, 'is not identified with any actual religion, nor confined to religious sentiment; it includes the intuitive, the non-measurable, the aesthetic, the caring and the loving'.¹²³ This idea is useful because it can be identified in Madame de Genlis's writing alongside respect for religion, and permits an analysis of her writing as being compatible with contemporary, ecologically conscientious ideology. Each of the chapters of this thesis demonstrates how

¹²⁰ Robert Kirkham, 'The Problem of Knowledge in Environmental Thought: A Counterchallenge', *The Ecological Community: Environmental Challenges for Philosophy, Politics and Morality*, ed. by Roger S. Gottlieb (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 193–207 (p. 194).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹²² Walter Schwarz and Dorothy Schwarz, *Breaking Through: Theory and Practice of Wholistic Living* (Bideford, UK: Green Books, 1987), p. 235. It might be valuable to explore the ecocritical perspective as an extension of care or virtue ethics. See *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 'In its earliest versions, virtue ethics began not with the question "What is the right thing to do?" but with the question "What is the best way to live?"' (p. 7).

¹²³ *Breaking Through*, p. 235, also cited in Dobson, p. 104.

Madame de Genlis's writing can be seen to encourage the fulfilment of Kirkham's tripartite imperative, through its embodiment in the figure of the post-Revolutionary citizen: re-personalising the citizen's interaction with or relationship to nature and the rural community, re-sacralising the natural world as a foundation for morality or ethics and, finally, re-spiritualising the environment by imbuing the natural world with socio-cultural or aesthetic meaning.

The first chapter presents Madame de Genlis's rural model, that is, the preference for a countryside setting in her texts. It examines the rural dwelling in its capacity as a conceivably inclusive 'home': a space with the potential to reshape and recast social codes and to reformulate the citizen's relationship with the environment. Dobson remarks that the 'Greeks first used the word *oikos* to describe a home, a place to which you could return and where you understood and were familiar with the local environment'.¹²⁴ In order to do so, citizens must re-personalise their interaction with nature by becoming 'dwellers in the land'. Kirkpatrick Sale, in his consideration of this notion, recalls E. F. Schumacher's explanation that:

To regain the spirit of the Greeks, to come to know the earth, fully and honestly, the crucial and perhaps only and all-encompassing task is to understand the place, the immediate, specific place, where we live [...]. We must somehow live as close to it as possible, be in touch with its particular soils, its waters, its winds; we must make its rhythms our patterns, its laws our guide, its fruits our bounty.¹²⁵

With its focus on familiarising the reader with daily life in the rural home and on dwelling in the rural environment, the *Maison rustique* can also be read as an illustration of Madame de Genlis's wider concerns about the function of the rural home in post-Revolutionary society. Considered in this light, the rebuilding of the rural home also becomes metaphorically representative of the reconstructed social edifice. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling explain:

Home is a place, a site in which we live. But more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy (as, for instance, in the phrase 'feeling at home'), but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation. These feelings, ideas and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial. Home is thus a spatial imaginary: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and

¹²⁴ *The Green Reader: Essays toward a Sustainable Society*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ Kirkpatrick Sale's discussion of E. F. Schumacher in 'Mother of All: An Introduction to Bioregionalism' in *People, Land and Community: Collected E. F. Schumacher Society Lectures*, ed. by Hildegard Hannum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 216-235 (p. 220).

feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places.¹²⁶

Madame de Genlis's *œuvre* portrays 'home' both as a place and as a spatial imaginary, which is the foundation for constructing the new nation. In this way, her thought mirrors ideas about home and its connection to society and the nation within the intellectual climate of the time. In his introduction to *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, for example, Michael O. Hardimon explains that Hegel 'sought to enable the people of the nineteenth century to overcome their alienation from the central social institutions – the family, civil society, and the state – and to come to "be at home" within them'.¹²⁷ Hegel maintains that 'people have a deep and abiding need to inhabit a social world that is a home', and furthermore, that 'freedom and that being at home in the social world are coextensive'.¹²⁸ According to this mode of thinking, people experience freedom – which, in Madame de Genlis's work, is translated into the ideal of citizenship and the privilege of equality it brings, only if they are 'at home' in the social world.

With the rise of individualism, stemming from new social freedom produced by the Revolution, Hegel saw the increasing danger of alienation, which he perceived as a threat to the development of harmonious post-Revolutionary communities, such as those reminiscent of the often idealised eighteenth-century picture of the Greek *polis*. His contemporary, Schiller, also recognised this threat and, in Bernard Cullen's words, claimed that the means of preventing division within society 'was through a process of aesthetic education, which would gradually overcome the dichotomies within the modern man; this new modern, "whole man" would recreate a community of purpose appropriate to the higher level of human development'.¹²⁹ As will become apparent in the second chapter of this thesis, if Madame de Genlis's characters wish to rehabilitate themselves within a rural community which is undergoing social reconstruction, they must reconcile individuality – or a sense of self-awareness corresponding to the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – with the ecological sensitivity crucial to the completion of the greater social project. As Madame de Genlis's instructional texts show, ecological awareness carries with it the expectation of social

¹²⁶ Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home, Key Ideas in Geography* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

¹²⁷ Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1. Hardimon explains that Hegel, who lived from 1770 – 1831, defines the "social world" as the form of society organized around the modern family, civil society, and the modern state', p. 131.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120 and p. 119.

¹²⁹ Bernard Cullen, *Hegel's Social and Political Thought: An Introduction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 29.

responsibility.

The second chapter of this thesis therefore focuses on developing an understanding of social responsibility within the rural community in Madame de Genlis's *œuvre*. Her ecologically responsive texts offer a didactic infrastructure for a social education which conveys an aestheticized, or culturally entrenched, notion of social responsibility. The system of learning she proposes, like that in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* – a text of which she produced her own edited version – provides the educational tools necessary to overcome Rousseau's well-known concept of division between the 'natural man', who is a completely self-sufficient being, and the *citoyen*, who is an active member of the community.¹³⁰ Indeed, describing herself as a 'citoyenne française', in her *Précis de ma conduite depuis la Révolution* (1796), Madame de Genlis's discussion of social justice within the fragmented post-Revolutionary socio-political order prompts her to ask: 'qui suis-je pour m'opposer à la volonté d'une nation entière?'.¹³¹ In this question we may infer the author's acknowledgment of a single, national will: a community which has or is entitled to the capacity to act as a united body for the benefit of all the citizens of France.

On this subject Arendt has underlined Rousseau's idea that 'only in the presence of the enemy can such a thing as *la nation une et indivisible*, the ideal of French and of all other nationalism, come to pass'.¹³² Following the dramatic socio-political upheaval of the Revolution, social division is the main threat posed to the evolution of a united nation, and social division, as we shall see, is itself implicated in a vicious cycle of environmental destruction and crisis. Arendt maintains that Robespierre's Revolutionary shift from a law promulgated in the name of the Republic to one acting in the name of the people 'meant that the enduring unity of the future political body was guaranteed not in the worldly institutions which this people held in common, but in the will of the people themselves'.¹³³ Interlocking with areas of contemporary ecocritical debate, this idea raises questions about the autonomy of the individual within the community: in Madame de Genlis's writing, re-personalising the citizen's interaction with the environment must occur on a deeply personal level, an individual level, in addition to the local, and ultimately national, level. In this state, upon

¹³⁰ See her *Émile ou De l'éducation par J. J. Rousseau: nouvelle édition à l'usage de la jeunesse, avec des retranchements, des notes et une préface*, 3 vols (Paris: Biret, 1820). See also Isabelle Brouard-Arends, 'Soumission et indépendance: la dynamique intertextuelle de l'*Émile* dans *Adèle et Théodore* de Madame de Genlis', *Études Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 9 (1997), 14-150.

¹³¹ Genlis, *Précis de la conduite de Madame de Genlis depuis la Révolution* (Paris: Lebel and Guitel, 1796), p. 241 (original emphasis).

¹³² Arendt, p. 77 (original emphasis).

¹³³ Arendt, p. 76.

whose shoulders does the responsibility for the welfare of the *peuple* now fall? How does Madame de Genlis's depiction of social responsibility promote ecological sensitivity?

According to Eugen Weber, whose landmark study *From Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976) traces the modernization of rural France between 1870 and 1914, 'national unity' – an ideology which emerges in Madame de Genlis's writing – 'is perceived as the expression of a general will – the general will of the French to be French, to achieve a state that was somehow historically preordained'.¹³⁴ The idea of predetermined national unity is thus dependent upon attributing value to intangible aspects of French culture: those which, after the Revolution, were in danger of becoming lost in the transmission of certain customs and traditions from one generation to the next. This, in turn, evokes Benedict Anderson's suggestion that nation-states are not founded upon 'objective' criteria, but rather, that nations have to be 'imagined' as communities.¹³⁵ Anderson's nation is imagined because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.¹³⁶ Applying this notion to Madame de Genlis's writing is crucial to an understanding of societal construction and of exactly how the rural community engenders notions of national identity in her texts. The imaginative and practical work of caring for the rural environment and the social edifice it supports is indeed a process which happens in and through her texts. In her *Mémoires inédits*, she writes: 'dominée par mon imagination et par mon enfance, j'ai toujours mieux aimé m'occuper de ce que je créais que de ce qui était'.¹³⁷ Ultimately, the second chapter studies the way in which issues of social responsibility – and the way in which these issues are resolved – present challenges to the construction of an ecologically balanced social edifice. In addition, it reveals the difficulties involved in maintaining socially responsible communities on both a local and a national scale.

The consequence of ongoing societal reformulation in Madame de Genlis's texts is the development of a new hierarchical structure, one which prioritises her insistence on the aesthetic, and its connection to morality, as a means of securing socio-political dominance for repatriated *émigrés* who feared for their placement within a volatile society. A sense of aesthetic appreciation, often an indicator of status, is a key aspect of this process. 'We are drawn to call something beautiful whenever we detect that it contains in a concentrated form

¹³⁴ Eugen Weber, *From Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 95.

¹³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ *Mémoires inédits*, I. 186.

those qualities in which we personally, or our societies more generally, are deficient’ observes Alain de Botton in the *Architecture of Happiness*, and this is the basis of Madame de Genlis’s fixation with the rural home: ‘We respect a style which can move us away from what we fear towards what we crave: a style which carries the correct dosage of our missing virtues’.¹³⁸ This style then, is the remedy for an acute sense of fear that socio-cultural information, and along with it, the values underpinning an imagined or idealised, morally superior society, will be lost. This anxiety is manifested in the *Dictionnaire critique*, where Madame de Genlis remarks:

Autrefois, quand on bâtissait, on voulait bâtir pour deux ou trois cents ans; on meublait la maison avec des tapisseries qui devaient durer autant que l’édifice; on respectait ses plantations comme l’héritage de ses enfants; c’étaient des bois sacrés. Aujourd’hui on coupe ses futaies, et on laisse à ses enfants des dettes, des tentures de papier, et des maisons neuves qui s’écroulent!¹³⁹

The cultural importance of building durable, lasting homes, in contrast to impermanent, economically convenient dwellings is made clear in this passage. Throughout her corpus Madame de Genlis can be said to advocate an ecologically sustainable approach in her plan to reconstruct the social edifice: it is one which must endure, in the sense of both its physical and social architecture. Each citizen carries the social responsibility of preserving the ‘héritage de ses enfants’, which is decidedly more than simply the monetary value of land, and even more than its potential aesthetic value. The landscape has meaning which transcends traditional economic notions of worth and which conveys, in their place, the social or ecological worth of the rural environment as ‘home’. This is an idea aptly summarised by geographer Edward Relph’s definition of landscape in *Place and Placelessness*:

Landscape is not merely an aesthetic background to life, rather it is a setting that both expresses and conditions cultural attitudes and activities, and significant modifications to landscapes are not possible without major changes in social attitudes. Landscapes are therefore always imbued with meanings that come from how and why we know them.¹⁴⁰

Madame de Genlis’s textually constructed rural environments raise social, economic and political questions about ownership and class, in similar ways to landscape paintings, as Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins suggest in *Gendering Landscape Art*: ‘they

¹³⁸ Alain de Botton, *The Architecture of Happiness* (London: Penguin Books, 2007). EBook.

¹³⁹ Taken from the entry on ‘égoïsme’ in the *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 165-166.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Academic Press, 1976), p.122.

question notions of how we give the environment visual form and the ideological and cultural issues that emerge when sites are variously presented as ideal, forbidden, despoiled, polluted, wasted or untouched'.¹⁴¹ In this way the rural environment becomes a socio-political tool: a form of ideological narrative-building which makes culture politically relevant and the power of the nobility culturally productive in opposition to the peasants' potential economic productivity. W. J. Thomas Mitchell in *Landscape and Power* (1994) draws upon Marx in order to describe the symbolic value of landscape:

As a fetishized commodity, landscape is what Marx called a 'social hieroglyph', an emblem of the social relations it conceals. At the same time that it commands a specific price, landscape represents itself as 'beyond price' a source of pure, inexhaustible, spiritual value.¹⁴²

This is an idea which casts light on tensions relating to economy, culture, and class emerging during the nineteenth century: the gulf between those who were at leisure to enjoy the rural landscape as a cultural commodity and those involved in the daily cultivation of the land as a source of livelihood. It is a notion which is central to understanding the importance of aesthetic value in Madame de Genlis's texts and its relationship to a moral or spiritual sense of worth that is integral to reconstructing the nation.

Having explored the rural setting, ideas about social responsibility within this environment, and the subsequent social anxieties expressed through ethical and aesthetic discourse, in the final chapter of the thesis I evaluate the realistic potential of the sustainable rural model for life in post-Revolutionary France. It investigates Madame de Genlis's frequent idealisation of the rural as idyll, with its cast of lone nature dwellers such as shepherds and hermits, suggesting a nostalgia for a past which never was, in which the fantasy of solitude sits uneasily alongside her arguments for progressive, inclusive models of community. This too is a significant area of debate within the field of contemporary ecocriticism, since, as Garrard argues:

Classical pastoral precedes the perception of a general crisis in human ecology by thousands of years, but it provides the pre-existing set of literary conventions and cultural assumptions that have been crucially transformed to provide a way for Europeans and Euro-Americans to construct their landscape.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Gendering Landscape Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁴² W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.15.

¹⁴³ Garrard, p. 38.

Notably, in Madame de Genlis's texts we can distinguish three temporal trajectories of the pastoral: the elegiac which looks back to a faded past with a sense of nostalgia; the idyll which consecrates – or re-sacralises – a fruitful present; and the utopia which looks toward a redeemed future. The ecocritical framework helps to make sense of these various orientations and to conceive of them according to an overarching desire for ecological reconciliation in the texts on a social, political and cultural level. As Garrard further explains:

Classical pastoral was disposed, then, to distort or mystify social and environmental history, whilst at the same time providing a locus legitimised by tradition, for the feelings of loss or alienation from nature to be produced by the Industrial Revolution.¹⁴⁴

Madame de Genlis draws on elements of classical pastoral in order to counterbalance the ever-increasing prospect of industrialisation, as will be demonstrated, in texts such as her *Suite de souvenirs de Félicie L****. We return once again to the theme of alienation so prevalent in each of the preceding chapters, and the subsequent desire to remedy this through the construction of a 'home' in the natural world. This chapter demonstrates the extent to which Madame de Genlis is socially and ecologically progressive and considers how her response to the anxieties of the early nineteenth century is tempered by a degree of conservative caution in the face of dramatic socio-political upheaval. It explores the construct of the idyll as a kind of multidimensional socio-cultural sanctuary: one which serves to legitimise and safeguard traditions, to maintain a certain standard of environmental ethics and practice and one which contributes to the construction of Anderson's 'imagined' community. Madame de Genlis, then, is the literary architect of the idealised ecological 'home' and presents a pioneering corpus which provides its readers with the practical and ideological tools necessary to rebuild this home, in its multifaceted sense. The *scènes champêtres* which she presents are symbolic of her imaginative, reconstructive vision, which is brought to life in and through her texts, and designed to be replicated across a unified French nation.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

CHAPTER ONE
THE RURAL MODEL

‘Les jacobins disaient: *Paix aux chaumières et guerre aux châteaux!*’

Dictionnaire critique et raisonné, I. 87.

Evaluating political philosopher Murray Bookchin’s contribution to an understanding of the present-day ecological crisis, Janet Biehl concludes that ‘social ecology has not only a critical dimension but a reconstructive one as well’.¹ In the early nineteenth century, Madame de Genlis’s body of writing emphasises the importance of the natural world as both a physical entity and a spatial imaginary: it is the literal and figurative foundation for reconstructing an ecologically balanced home. Her social and political ideology informs her ideas about the rural home – and the nation it ultimately represents – thereby offering a critical response to the social questions of the time. In the rural setting, ‘home’ is a space of potential social integration, in a practical – or functional – socio-economic sense, in addition to being a socio-cultural, or aesthetic, model of ecological stability and sustainability for the wider community and nation. Texts such as her *Maison rustique* are thus situated at the material and symbolic juncture of home and homeland, depicting an idealised mode of living, which suggests that the rural home can fully satisfy readers’ material, moral, spiritual, and educational needs, while simultaneously shaping their attitudes towards post-Revolutionary reconstruction on a national level.

Exploring the social challenges faced by citizens as they readjust to rural life in a new socio-political context, this chapter investigates the way in which the natural world shapes the rural home, its architecture and its function in Madame de Genlis’s portrayal of early nineteenth-century France. Her focus on the lived experience of home, on a domestic scale, extending outwards thereafter to the surrounding community, encapsulates a current of thought similar to that of Bookchin. Like many ecocritical scholars, he views society’s current trajectory towards ecological catastrophe as the product of social factors, envisioning a ‘social life scaled to human dimensions’, and the solution as a form of politics which is ‘directly democratic at the community level’.² With successful application of what will be termed the ‘rural model’ in Madame de Genlis’s writing, comes the prospect of rehabilitating citizens within their environment, re-personalising their relationship with nature, and

¹ *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

alleviating social need. The range of rural dwellings presented in her texts – from the *château* to the *chaumière*, and, as we will see, even the farm and its accompanying cowshed – are socially reconfigured, each with the capacity to function as ‘homely’ spaces integrated within the natural world. Furthermore, as Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling suggest in *Home*, ‘home-spaces and home-making practices are intimately bound together over a range of scales, and are closely shaped by the exercise of power and resistance and by what is imagined as “foreign” or unhomely’.³

As Hardimon observes, in order to come to be ‘at home’ in a politically, economically, and socially fractured rural environment, citizens must overcome their alienation from the central social institutions in an attempt to restore a kind of social or ecological balance.⁴ Blunt and Dowling’s consideration of home-spaces and home-making practices, applied to Madame de Genlis’s texts, draws out a number of societal tensions in her writing, in addition to introducing a central paradox: acceptance of the rural model as ‘home’ is a reality presented within the texts, and yet, may only be achieved once the reader learns to understand and re-personalise their relationship with the *oikos*. This raises questions about the rehabilitation of social groups within the early nineteenth-century rural environment, especially regarding the *émigrés* and *paysans* with whom she is principally concerned in the selected corpus, and their symbiotic relationship with nature.

UNDERSTANDING THE ‘NATURAL’ WORLD: NATURE AS *OIKOS*

Suzanne Nash, in *Home and its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, sets out specific criteria for a definition of the nineteenth-century home, which was ‘conceived of as one’s *pays d’origine* with its very concrete – linguistic, culinary, artisanal – expressions of daily life’.⁵ From this perspective, we can already begin to separate the socio-cultural ‘human’ elements that combine to create a figurative sense of home from the concept of home as a geographical reality that is embodied here by the notion of *pays d’origine*. How, then, is home to be understood in Madame de Genlis’s writing? A consideration of the natural world as *oikos* – humankind’s home in nature – as a principle at the heart of her rural model, sheds light on a complex relationship between the various living organisms and inanimate entities

³ Blunt and Dowling, p.188.

⁴ Hardimon, p. 1.

⁵ Suzanne Nash, ‘Introduction’, in *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Suzanne Nash (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 1-22 (p. 7).

classed as ‘non-human others’ that make up the Earth.⁶ The very idea of ‘origin’ and of belonging to a *pays d’origine*, whether on a local or national scale, raises questions about human identity, in addition to questions about humankind’s capacity to manipulate the natural world while being biologically connected to it, and consequently, about an ever-evolving relationship with nature.

On this subject, Jacques Gélis, whose anthropological study of birth and fertility in early modern France outlines the many customs and traditions associated with the cycle of life in rural communities, emphasises the extent to which human culture was both entrenched within and in harmony with the natural world. According to Gélis, ‘man, finding his essence extending out into the world, also found the world within himself: one was mirrored in the other’.⁷ Acute early modern sensitivity to the rural environment is further emphasised by Gélis, who highlights the seemingly forgotten human capacity to understand ‘everything which sprang from the living soil’, a skill which he believes to have been, at one time, intuitively ‘learned from childhood’.⁸ He subsequently refers to “‘the world we have lost” in the last two centuries’, a world of ‘essential impulses, a particular way of feeling, listening, decoding the messages which come from plants, animals and stones’.⁹ In its place came a world of increasingly material and often artificial, socio-culturally constructed signifiers.

The use of this ‘world’ by human beings, as a multifaceted resource to support the social edifice, is a result of anthropocentrism in the environment. This reflects humankind’s inclination to act on socially driven impulses: to imbue environments with meaning during the process of fulfilling material needs through acts such as clearing the land – the desire to *défricher la terre* in Madame de Genlis’s writing, for example – in order to cultivate it, harvest produce, and construct dwellings. Today, acts such as these, driven by social factors,

⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the ‘non-human other’, see Kate Rigby, ‘Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere’, in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 139-52. She notes that the ‘urgent need for [...] a critical theory of social-natural relations arises from the increasingly anthropogenic character of our earthly environs, or “the nature that we are not”, coupled with the growing technologization of the human body, or “the nature that we ourselves are”’ (p. 140). The term ‘non-human other’ will also be used to refer to ‘other-than-human-entities’ or ‘other-than-human-nature’ such as plants and animals.

⁷ Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, English edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 7. Writing on the subject of interrelatedness, he states: ‘The theory of the microcosm gained a new lease of life with the coming of the Renaissance. The human body was seen as the perfect mirror of the great universal body, and the two worlds were closely connected, each and every element in the one finding its echo or its symbolic double in the other. Everything went to show that the world we live in was not chaos, but the perfected product of the Creator’s thought and organizing power’ (p. 8). Furthermore Maurice Halbwachs also notes how deeply rooted in nature the customs of the *paysan* are, since ‘members of such a group live on a piece of land, and amid scenes which in a sense are part of them and of their group’, in *The Psychology of Social Class* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), p. 26.

⁸ Gélis, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

are considered to be the cause of many of the social inequalities which Bookchin, for example, sees as being linked with environmental degradation.¹⁰ Thus, Buell's notion of 'mutual constructionism' is brought to bear upon the land and, from the early nineteenth century onwards, humankind's relationship with nature is increasingly symbiotic and fraught with tension. Close analysis of Madame de Genlis's texts, through an ecocritical lens, illuminates the development of such ecological patterns at a precise moment of crisis in French history: the socio-political upheaval of the Revolution.

Notably, ecocritical discourses propose a definition of 'world' which is rooted in an ethical discussion, not only in so far as it relates to how a world might in fact be 'lost', as Gélis suggests, or, alternatively, preserved and sustained, but also one which is inseparable from the development of identity and the relationship between organisms as they interact with one another. Indeed, Timothy Morton, in 'Coexistence and Coexistents: Ecology without a World', draws attention to Trevor Norris's idea of world as the 'dynamic relatedness that grounds our identity'.¹¹ A world, in this sense, is a 'zone of things that surround the sentient being, which have various kinds of significance for that being'.¹² Consequently, it is possible to come to an understanding of the world as the relationship between humankind and the environment that arises by way of the 'expressions of daily life' – to borrow Nash's phrase once again. In Madame de Genlis's textually constructed world, which is, rather, a model for the construction of a very particular, idealised, post-Revolutionary world, a variety of environments are described. The designed, the aesthetic, the productive, and the 'natural' – or untamed – environments are present, though these categories are not mutually exclusive, each contributing in some measure to a textually fabricated idea of *oikos* as home.¹³

Madame de Genlis establishes the notion of home in what she perceives as natural terms, renewing her reader's perception of the world in a manner akin to Buell's idea of mutual constructionism in nature. She constructs the 'natural' in her own rhetoric, using language that connects the natural world with the divine, and therefore with morality: in order to come to be at home, citizens must understand nature, and in order to so they must

¹⁰ See Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.

¹¹ Timothy Morton, 'Coexistence and Coexistents: Ecology without a World', in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, p. 168.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹³ See John L. Motloch's *Introduction to Landscape Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), for an in-depth discussion of these categories.

understand the ‘living word of God’, which is received through text.¹⁴ In *L’Étude du cœur humain*, Madame de Genlis suggests that ‘l’homme sans révélation’, unfamiliar with God’s word, and thus nature, cannot be at home, nor can he be productive in the natural world:

La parole toute puissante, la parole de Dieu, n’ayant pu parvenir jusqu’à lui, il ne formera point de langage, il ne formera que des sons inarticulés, il végétera sur la terre [...] il descendra dans la tombe sans laisser de traces’.¹⁵

For her, those who have not experienced divine revelation cannot possess a meaningful form of language, and consequently, become dislocated from the environment, or world, they inhabit. Linguistic ability separates human beings from non-human nature, indicating the uniquely human capacity for understanding one’s place in the natural world and for creating new, artificial, social constructs. Seen in this light, the Republic, a human construct, forms part of a natural, moral order, which, for Madame de Genlis, is crafted through text. In an intellectual climate which is increasingly secular in its orientation, linking the natural world and the divine allows her to develop a moral conception of citizenship which is compatible with both Republican values and her religious beliefs.

As humankind grows distant from her own interpretation of nature and ‘le naturel’, Madame de Genlis critiques social behaviours deemed ‘unnatural’, which are reflected in the language of common usage after the Revolution. ‘Le naturel, la franchise, la simplicité’, she writes in her *Dictionnaire critique*, ‘sont devenus des agréments fort rares dans les livres et les talents de la société’.¹⁶ She denounces ‘affectation’ in particular, which, in her view, was influenced by the ‘philosophie moderne [qui] corrompait les mœurs et dénouait tous les liens de la société’.¹⁷ In this regard, she rejects ‘*le langage de la sensibilité*’, which for her, represents an a kind of artifice leading to moral degeneration far removed from Gélis’s portrayal of early modern man: ‘cette espèce [d’affectation]’, she notes, ‘en entraîna beaucoup d’autres, et donna à la fin de ce siècle un caractère de fausseté qui devint à peu près général’.¹⁸ Taking aim at the pervasiveness of ‘affectation’ in French society, this text supports her socio-political vision of an re-imagined, natural nation, unambiguously defining its terms. It is a valuable indicator of the ideological infrastructure that supports her rural

¹⁴ *Holy Bible: New International Version* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008). See Hebrews 4. 12: ‘For the word of God is living and active’.

¹⁵ *L’Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 9-10. See also: ‘L’homme qui n’a pu jouir du bienfait de la révélation sera muet et sans idées’, *ibid* (p. 9).

¹⁶ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (original emphasis).

model – that is, for re-instating the ‘lost’ link between society and nature by restoring ‘le naturel’ – despite the fact that this constructed interpretation of what is natural is itself artificial.

Society, more generally, must undergo a similar process of transformation, eradicating ‘fausseté’, in word and deed, if its expressions of daily life are to promote an ecologically harmonious idea of home. ‘L’artifice’, claims Madame de Genlis, ‘est toujours sans grâce, parce que tout ce qui manque de naturel n’en peut avoir’.¹⁹ The aesthetic qualities associated with ‘le naturel’ in her writing – such as grace, elegance, and simplicity – promote the eradication of artifice across all levels of the social edifice. Her desire to eliminate what she considers to be artificial corresponds to a simplified social ethos, which favours human productivity over the pastoral affectations of the pre-Revolutionary nobility. Therefore, ‘la maison d’un sage’, according to Madame de Genlis ‘ne doit pas être magnifique; nous n’aurons ni colonnes ni pilastres’.²⁰ The purely ornamental function of the pilaster, to give the appearance of a supporting column, is regarded as superfluous since true wisdom insists on simplicity and utility, echoing the new aesthetic of the nineteenth-century home. Furthermore, writing of ‘agriculture’ in the *Dictionnaire critique*, Madame de Genlis remarks, for example, that ‘à la fin du dernier siècle le goût de l’agriculture fut, comme toute autre chose, une prétention’. She notes that ‘tous se crurent tout à coup des *Cincinnatus*. Il leur suffisait pour cela d’avoir des chapeaux et des souliers gris, et de se promener le matin une heure dans les champs’.²¹ In Madame de Genlis’s vision of post-Revolutionary France, however, the need to practise agriculture in order to re-establish the notion of home has become a reality.

While Madame de Genlis emphasises the need for citizens to adapt to new modes of living, in doing so, she stresses the divide emerging between those who understand the natural and those who do not. This manifests itself as an anxiety about conserving certain socio-cultural practices while instituting new ones, in and through her texts. In the entry for ‘néologisme’, a word which in itself is evocative of sweeping change and a trenchant desire to reconstruct every aspect of the social edifice, she expresses regret for the dissolution of social modes of being which have been lost.²² This is, furthermore, in contrast to those opposing the creation of new words and expressions following the Revolution: words and

¹⁹ Ibid., I. 219 (see the entry for ‘fausseté’).

²⁰ *Les Veillées du château*, III. 267.

²¹ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 14

²² Ibid., II. 3. She also comments that ‘la révolution a été précédée par quinze années d’innovations en toutes choses, et d’un changement dans nos modes, nos mœurs, nos maisons, nos jardins: il semblait que l’on préludait à un bouleversement universel’ (I. 280).

phrases ‘entièrement supprimées dans les livres et dans les conversations de toutes les classes depuis vingt-cinq ans’.²³ While she views the creation of new words favourably, she cites the following expressions as examples of unfortunate losses from common usage, which have a negative impact on the community: ‘*je ne suis pas capable de décider cela; je ne puis avoir d’opinion à cet égard; je ne sais; je n’y ai pas réfléchi*’.²⁴ The disappearance of these phrases indicates a sense of conservative unease about the dissolution of social divides. Everyone, it seems, was engaging with political debate: ‘sans distinction d’état, de sexe et d’âge, nous sommes en état de conseiller tous les souverains de l’univers’.²⁵ While this example betrays a perceptible concern for the changing nature of social status, which permeates a number of her texts, close analysis of her work reveals a more complex link between contemporary socio-cultural customs and the desire to restore the natural. Predicated upon divine authority, the ‘natural’ is that which legitimises the social edifice, an artificial construct that relies on past traditions, bodies of knowledge, and texts – expressions of daily life – as a means of (re)imagining socio-political communities. Madame de Genlis fears the loss of authority within communities, an idea aptly summarised by Arendt when she writes:

Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals – the most unstable and futile beings we know of. Its loss is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world, which indeed since then has begun to shift, to change and transform itself with ever-increasing rapidity from one shape into another, as though we were living and struggling with a Protean universe where everything at any moment can become almost anything else. But the loss of worldly permanence and reliability – which is politically identical with the loss of authority – does not entail, at least not necessarily, the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us.²⁶

By respecting the traditional framework of authority within the community, citizens who refrain from expressing overtly individualistic opinions – which for Madame de Genlis indicate iconoclastic attitudes – do not pose a threat to the social edifice. The repetition of the ‘je’ in each of the statements – ‘*je ne suis pas capable de décider cela; je ne puis avoir d’opinion à cet égard; je ne sais; je n’y ai pas réfléchi*’ – is not necessarily related to the fear of the rise of the individual as a capitalist consumer, but rather, reveals a certain apprehension regarding the lack of community and communal bonds in socio-political decision making. In

²³ Ibid., II. 3.

²⁴ Ibid., II. 3 (original emphasis).

²⁵ Ibid., II. 4 (entry for ‘néologisme’).

²⁶ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, pp. 94-5.

Les Annales de la vertu, she would affirm that ‘les devoirs du citoyen sont grands et sacrés, mais ceux de la nature le sont davantage encore’, meaning that, for her, the bond of nature existing between humans – particularly those which are familial – should further develop the bond of nationhood.

Therefore, she does not begrudge citizens the possibility of social freedom that accompanies an education, on the contrary, she emphasises the necessity and usefulness of her own work as a means of coming to terms with the changes brought about by the Revolution. Her model aims to enlighten citizens by encouraging socio-political reconciliation, putting nature and the natural in balance with community. Although Madame de Genlis’s belief in the importance of human rights is attested throughout her works, and, in addition, she was an early advocate of progressive pedagogical practice – such as foreign language learning – she nevertheless fears that an appropriate balance between the newly emerging individual and the authority of the community might not be attained:

Il est beau sans doute de voir des écoliers laissant là l’étude du grec et du latin, pour instruire leurs maîtres des intérêts des nations et des *droits de l’homme* ou d’entendre des jeunes de vingt ans tenir tête à des vieillards, afin de leur prouver qu’on n’a besoin ni d’instruction, ni de réflexion, ni d’expérience pour décider, en dernier ressort, de la forme des gouvernements et du destin des empires. Il est curieux de voir des femmes s’extasier, se passionner et se mettre en fureur pour ou contre les idées libérales. Mais nous avons acheté bien cher cette grande science, qui nous tient lieu de toutes les autres; elle a fait tomber en décadence les études de la jeunesse et de la littérature.²⁷

New systems must be approved by reliable, tested means and thus, with this statement, she justifies the need for a complete, comprehensive educational system which maps experience onto post-Revolutionary social development and charts socio-cultural, linguistic, and textual territory in danger of being forgotten. Liberal ideas must be supported by the long-standing authority conferred by tradition: this does not devalue ‘cette grande science’ but rather enshrines an ecologically diverse and comprehensive educational programme. Liberal thought offers citizens a renewed perspective on the natural world, yet it does not adequately replace the influence of tradition and a sense of history in the formation of the social edifice because the moral order of society ought to be, for her, associated with the body of knowledge amassed over time within communities. Liberal thought, because of its individualistic character, may sever natural bonds established throughout history. Her pedagogical scheme is balanced because it addresses the intuitive and the spiritual, in

²⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 4 (original emphasis).

addition to the material or physical.

In the *Dictionnaire critique*, she argues that, ‘dans la société, dans la littérature, le goût prescrit la simplicité, le naturel, la modération, la modestie’, qualities which are ‘toujours sage[s]’.²⁸ Extremes of social behaviour are re-negotiated, as we shall see, through the ‘natural’, although, as this quotation demonstrates, the marked socio-cultural implications of prescribed taste indicate a desire to apply this interpretation for reasons beyond the simple ecological ideal of dwelling in nature.²⁹ Detachment from the natural world moves society towards a state which will inevitably require Bookchin’s re-harmonisation of human with human in order to restore ecological balance. Madame de Genlis’s belief is that ultimately, once the usage of these previously mentioned lost phrases becomes commonplace in society, ‘il n’y aura plus de guerres civiles dans les maisons, la paix sera dans les familles comme dans toute l’Europe: tels seront les effets heureux de ces phrases magiques’.³⁰ Texts, particularly those which are instructional in a practical sense, have the power to bring about political reconciliation and, consequently, to influence the form of governments and empires. They can produce positive change in the realm of social ecology. Her restorative vision is not restricted to France alone: the house is naturally linked to the family inhabiting it, thereby emphasising social relations as being integral to concepts of home, the nation, and beyond this, empire. In a similar vein, she refers to a metonymic concept of home, made popular at the time, which aligns the local with the national: ‘une expression inventée par La Mothe, et qui est restée: “Foyer, pour dire, retourner dans sa patrie”’.³¹

Home is at the centre of the rural model and the *Maison rustique* fulfils a threefold purpose in the restoration of a ‘lost’ world, allowing readers to build a foundation of knowledge with which to understand the natural world as the ‘non-human other’, to decode the cultural symbolism closely tied to nature which humankind has developed over time, and to participate actively in the process of reconstruction. In this text, home is a geographical reality and a varied, symbolic reality tied to the culturally constructed notion of *patrie* and the *pays d’origine*. The impact of this realisation is further heightened by the fact that the protagonists in the narrative are *émigrés* who have been displaced from their natural milieu. It

²⁸ Ibid., I. 246. In this section, Madame de Genlis defines ‘goût’ as ‘l’instinct de la raison’.

²⁹ Describing her own teaching methods in *Les Jeux champêtres des enfants* and their reliance on the natural world, she affirms that ‘tous les systèmes absolus sont mauvais. Il est indispensable [...] de garder un juste milieu’ (p. x).

³⁰ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 7.

³¹ Ibid., II. 9. Madame de Genlis also informs us that this expression entered into common usage in spite of criticism from the author, Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines, in the *Dictionnaire néologique à l’usage des beaux esprits du siècle* (1727): “rentrer dans ses foyers, c’est comme si on disait: rentrer dans sa cheminée” (original emphasis, used to denote a quotation).

is perhaps pertinent to note here that, in responding to criticism of the *Maison rustique*, in the preface to the *Botanique*, Madame de Genlis refutes suggestions that the work is impractical owing to its broad and thus superficial educational scope and, equally, that it is of minimal value to society more generally because of its focus on the rehabilitation of the nobility within rural society:

Je propose, dit-on, un *trop beau plan de maison*. Voulant donner l'idée de la manière de bâtir, je ne devais pas me contenter de n'offrir que le plan d'une petite maison: d'ailleurs, j'ai donné celui d'une simple ferme. Mon ouvrage ne présente, dit-on, encore que des *marquis* et des *comtes*; il entrait dans mon plan de faire reparaître des émigrés rendus à leur patrie.³²

This criticism of the work – and her response to it – indicates, yet again, anxiety about social status pervading the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century. Here it is implied that priority is given to the aesthetic condition of the house as a mere sketch of agricultural application as opposed to practical content, alongside a preference for instructing the upper echelons of society. While this is an ever-present tension in Madame de Genlis's writing, it is a consequence of an ambitious project to incorporate a spectrum of 'expressions of daily life' and a variety of instructional methods, which accentuate the moral and the spiritual in conjunction with the purely practical aspects of life in the rural community.

The *Maison rustique* therefore functions as a literary artefact that contains both scientific and cultural content which encourages readers to form a long-term attachment to the rural environment and to develop habitual cultural practices: a process of identity formation that shapes their attitudes towards nature. Madame de Genlis further illuminates the link between habitual customs and a sense of national identity through her comment in the *Dictionnaire critique* that: 'il y a une sorte de constance à tenir à ses habitudes, et cet attachement contribue puissamment à fortifier celui que nous devons à la patrie'.³³ She adds that 'si dans tous les pays policés on retrouvait exactement la même manière de vivre, les mêmes coutumes, enfin les mêmes habitudes, l'amour du pays serait partout affaibli de moitié... Les habitudes nationales sont donc sous ce rapport infiniment respectables'.³⁴ This highlights the way in which variety is seen as beneficial, and thus how home-making practices affect one's relationship with a nation, embodied by a geographical reality. She

³² *Botanique*, pp. v-vi (original emphasis).

³³ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 254 (entry for 'habitudes').

³⁴ *Ibid.* (original ellipses). Moreover, in the entry on 'frivolité', she comments on the natural characteristic of the French, noting: 'Il n'y a rien de si effrayant que de voir les Français dépourvus de politesse, de galanterie et d'agréments. Quand ils sont sans grâce et sans gaieté, c'est une chose tellement contre nature, qu'il semble que l'on pourrait déclarer que la *patrie est en danger*' (original emphasis), I. 233.

continues, offering an austere picture of ‘les habitudes nationales’ at the moment of revolution:

On les proscrivit toutes; ainsi que la religion, le gouvernement, les opinions, les coutumes; on changea la géographie de la France; son calendrier, ses lois, son costume, ses usages et même son langage, par un néologisme qui forma une nouvelle langue: on cessa d’être Français.³⁵

Here the socio-cultural infrastructure of the nation, and its home-making practices, are explicitly linked to the geography of France. With these words she justifies the creation of her model and the need to preserve that which is danger of being lost. The *Maison rustique* is a new home, but it is anchored in history through its connection to the natural world. In equal measure, the *Dictionnaire critique*, *Botanique*, and the *Herbier moral* serve as further textual resources which enhance the conception of nature as a symbolic imaginary mapped onto a geographical reality. They are texts which mark a return to the notion of a founding myth in rural communities, echoing Gélis’s ‘lost world’, as a means for citizens to comprehend their place within a new socio-political context. The creation of this myth, integral to the successful application of Madame de Genlis’s rural model, entails a process of cultural selection and de-selection of customs and practices rooted in nature, which help shape the *pays d’origine* on a national scale.

In *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig reminds us that the ‘reproduction of nation-states depends upon a dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting, and of imagination and unimaginative repetition’.³⁶ This is a pattern which emerges from Madame de Genlis’s writing as she participates in a process of preserving cultural heritage through the art of the instructional text. In the *Dictionnaire critique*, she recalls that, ‘avant la Révolution on appelait avoir bon air la noblesse et l’élégance dans le maintien, dans la manière de s’habiller, de meubler sa maison, de recevoir chez soi etc.’.³⁷ This, once again, exposes her anxiety about social roles which manifests itself through home-making practices, both in the material sense as well as those custom-based expressions of daily life in the home. Following the Revolution, however, she informs us that: ‘lorsqu’une société toute neuve commença à se rassembler, le bon air dont on vient de parler était tout-à-fait oublié’, indicative of the ripples of social change affecting each of the facets of domestic life associated with another artificial construct – *le bon air*. It is an observation which has a critical dimension as well as a

³⁵ Ibid., I. 255.

³⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), p. 10.

³⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 16 (original emphasis).

reconstructive one, reminiscent of Janet Biehl's conclusion about Bookchin's social ecology: again reaffirming the means of establishing an ecological society through Madame de Genlis's own model. The consequence of this forgetting would be that 'la plus grande partie de ceux qui allaient ouvrir de grandes maisons, n'avaient jamais pu les connaître', aware only that 'il faut qu'un beau salon soit bien doré et bien éclairé', leading to the adoption of a new attitude: an aesthetic of simplicity that prevails in the early nineteenth-century home and becomes a catalyst in the modification of social conduct, and thus, the home environment. Madame de Genlis describes this as '*un bon air français très simplifié*'.³⁸

Implicit in this idea is the lack of organic progression in the transmission of selected concepts, customs, and trends from one generation to the next. More than this, however, this idea demonstrates that the objective of the rural model transcends a simple return to nature. Although sincere in her support of social progress, her socio-economic and cultural bias preconditions her views of the post-Revolutionary landscape, which leaves the rural model as the ideal authoritative framework, both practically and aesthetically, to convey her discontent about forgotten expressions of daily life in the home, and to express her respect for tradition. In focusing on home, she is able to diffuse the frequently opposing, sometimes complementary tensions induced by the Revolution, which is akin to Billig's dialectic of forgetting and remembering within the rural model.³⁹

Like Billig, Madame de Genlis participates in both selective remembering and forgetting, in terms of her conception of home. This ultimately allows her to recast her understanding of the history of the nation as homeland, a process which is viewed as (re)constructive. Billig's work supports this notion of resetting history in the context of national memory. He emphasises Ernest Renan's suggestion that, since nations are frequently brought into existence through violence, once the nation is established 'its continued existence depends upon a collective amnesia'.⁴⁰ Billig further develops this concept, adding:

Not only is the past forgotten, as it is ostensibly being recalled, but so there is a parallel forgetting of the present. As will be suggested, national identity in established nations is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, which constantly remind, or 'flag', nationhood. However, these reminders, or 'flaggings', are so numerous and they are such a familiar part of the social environment, that they operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., I. 17 (original emphasis).

³⁹ Billig, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 42.

In Madame de Genlis's work in particular, we might highlight the socially divisive connotations of the relationship between memory, instruction, language, and home-making practices in both the upper and lower echelons.

A more explicit example based in a natural setting is her *Rosière de Salency*. The rose, which is central to the festival, contributes to a kind of narrative of humankind and nature and to ideas about social freedom. 'Dans ma jeunesse', she recalls, 'j'ai fait sortir de son obscurité la rose de Salency: j'en fis le sujet d'une pièce dans le *Théâtre d'Éducation* [...] et j'ai été la première cause de l'établissement de toutes les rosières fondées en France, depuis cette époque'.⁴² According to Madame de Genlis, this involved reinstating a historical rural custom in France whereby the girl most remarkable for her modesty and good conduct was presented with a rose by the judge of the district, and was thus given the title of *rosière*.⁴³ Madame de Genlis is able to give a full account of the event, having known a 'magistrat de Chauny et bailli de Salency', who is mystified that the inhabitants of the village insist that he should spend forty-eight hours judging the *fête* each year, ultimately awarding the title-holder 'non pas une maison, ou un pré, ou un héritage, mais une rose'.⁴⁴ Her description emphasises the inclination of the *paysan* to cherish nature and its socio-cultural significance above the prospect of economic gain. The natural world is attributed a value which is directly comparable with home and is firmly rooted within the cultural memory of the local population, strengthening their sense of identity and the bond between them. As Daniel Roche argues:

The century was coming to an end, and the good peasant, as opposed to the evil city-dweller, was the incarnation of a new exorcism. The customs which were for Rousseau 'the morality of the people' – idealised rustic fêtes, songs which were included in the great repertoires – all promised a new fraternity.⁴⁵

Madame de Genlis develops the link between socio-cultural practice and nature as a means of reinforcing citizenship. Here we see the beginnings of Roche's promise of 'a new fraternity', built on a tradition fixed in the natural world – the symbolic giving of a rose. By re-igniting enthusiasm for an already established tradition, Madame de Genlis draws upon the socio-

⁴² *Mémoires inédits*, VI. 281.

⁴³ Sarah C. Maza has given a detailed account of this ancient *fête* in 'The Rose-Girl of Salency', in *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 68-111.

⁴⁴ *Mémoires inédits*, I. 247.

⁴⁵ Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. by Marie Evans (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers Limited, 1987), p. 43.

cultural authority this model invokes, as explained by Arendt.

Examining cultural memory in an ecocritical context in ‘Dialoguing with Bakhtin’, Patrick D. Murphy outlines the dominant anthropocentric viewpoint from which Western civilisation derives its self-reflexive historical narrative:

Part of the crisis of humanity is precisely the degree to which human societies and individuals do not allow non-human others to participate in aesthetic memory and in the generation of self-understanding of our outward personalities and perceptions of ourselves as characters within our own stories.⁴⁶

Murphy’s term, ‘the crisis of humanity’, is striking in that it reaffirms the social nature of ecological problems: that is, the hegemonic influence exerted by humankind over the natural world has suppressed its potential ‘voice’ or literary contribution to social ecology. At the crux of Bakhtin’s realisation that he “‘must become another in relation to himself” in order to evaluate nature, is his assertion that one cannot be the author of one’s own individual value, that is, meaning, and consequently ‘worth’ is derived from relationships, such as that between humanity and its surroundings, as Madame de Genlis’s texts also suggest.⁴⁷

The non-human other, in Madame de Genlis’s texts, occupies a prominent place in the narrative, more than simply as background to be engaged with.⁴⁸ Flowers, as non-human entities, carry particular significance, as she writes: ‘je crois que personne ne s’est occupé de fleurs autant que moi: une ou plusieurs fleurs jouent un rôle intéressant dans chacun de mes romans, et dans presque toutes mes nouvelles’.⁴⁹ The work undertaken in her *Botanique* represents ‘d’immenses recherches sur les événements produits par des fleurs, sur le culte que plusieurs nations leur ont rendu, enfin sur les charmantes productions comme attributs et

⁴⁶ Patrick D. Murphy, ‘Dialoguing with Bakhtin over Ethical Responsibility to Others’, in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, p. 157. Arendt states: ‘All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable, infected, as it were, by the mortality of their authors. However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishable, then these things would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except men. The human capacity to achieve this was remembrance. Mnemosyne, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses’, in *Between Past and Future*, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Murphy, p. 156. See the notion of ‘transgredience’ – whereby an individual seeks to experience life on a ‘plane that is different from the one on which we actually experience our own life’, connecting ‘anthropocentrism with ecocentrism’ and addressing the problem of trying to ‘speak for nature or to let nature speak through oneself as an author’. See also p. 158.

⁴⁸ For further discussion of the human and the non-human other, see *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons*, ed. by Serpil Oppermann, Ufuk Özdağ, Nevin Özkan, and Scott Slovic (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 67.

⁴⁹ *Mémoires inédits*, VI. 281.

comme emblèmes’.⁵⁰ Failure to recognise the symbolic significance of non-human others, such as flowers, in history, increases the alienation of the individual from nature. The individual thus faces moral corruption through failure to connect in relationships with entities beyond his or herself. In this regard, she criticises, for example, the narcissistic tendency in the emerging trend of celebrating one’s birthday – she reminds us that in ancient Rome ‘des hérauts, pour garantir les triomphateurs de l’orgueil, criaient près de leur char: *souviens-toi que tu n’es qu’un homme*’.⁵¹ The day of birth considered as a tribute to a mother who forms a bond with another living being through the act of birth, is, however, deemed worthy of commemoration. While her texts are anthropocentric in that they present strategies for the perfectibility of humankind, they stress that the work of humankind is only valuable in relation to an ‘other’ – as community.

The non-human other, meanwhile, is elevated to a position from which it may participate in acts of remembrance or commemoration. A pertinent example of this is the ebony tree within the ruins of the chapel in the *Maison rustique*. The farmer, Girard, who is, in many ways, an exemplary practitioner of the rural model, is the only member of the community to remain in the village throughout the Revolution. After the inhabitants of the village have departed, he remains behind to care for the land. He plants ‘un ébénier à l’endroit même où jadis était l’autel’, a space which he had ‘soigneusement marqué’, because it was the site at which Volnis and his wife exchanged their wedding vows, in addition to being a sacred space for the community.⁵² He takes Volnis to see the tree: ‘l’arbre a prospéré, vous le trouverez tout couvert de fleurs’.⁵³ With this action, not only does he renew a previously deferential relationship with Volnis through the bond they have now developed through appreciation of the natural world, but he also maintains the link between past and present by conserving a site of memory attached to the original home. The tree remains *in situ*, and is incorporated into the design for the new chapel, which is built around it.⁵⁴ In this way, emphasis on nature allows characters to form an understanding of humankind’s spiritual home in the rural environment.

Similarly, an entry in the *Botanique*, supposedly drawn from history, recounts how an ancient tree becomes the ‘monument vénérable d’une douloureuse émigration’ for French citizens living in exile in Germany:

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 2 (original emphasis – entry on ‘Jour de naissance’).

⁵² *Maison rustique*, I. 8.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

On voit auprès de Berlin un *arbre historique*, aussi intéressant que curieux. Il est chargé de vers, d'inscriptions et de noms français, tracés par les premiers réfugiés, qui, à l'époque de la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes, reçurent l'hospitalité dans le Brandebourg. Ces caractères, prodigieusement grossis par le temps, couvrent entièrement le tronc de cet arbre antique, et la mélancolie touchante qui règne dans toutes les inscriptions prouve assez que toutes les inscriptions d'une noble hospitalité ne peuvent faire oublier la patrie.⁵⁵

This 'arbre historique' becomes a living text, which records memory while relating an ongoing story. The *émigrés* leave indelible marks on its trunk, which, in the absence of a physical dwelling, are representative of the marks they would ordinarily leave upon the face of their *patrie*. Their names, alongside lines of verse, perform the function of a textual anchor of cultural memory, while the shelter of its branches represents, both literally and metaphorically, an eternal home in nature. The tree is impersonal because of its 'natural' origin and yet, for this very same reason, because of its status as a 'non-human other' it can be said to belong to all. This recalls, once again, Blunt and Dowling's notion of the home as a spatial imaginary imbued with feeling which, in this case, is nostalgic melancholy produced by displacement. The 'noble hospitalité' offered by the Germans cannot replace 'home' because it does not provide a space for the individual to work within or to carry out home-making practices: a space to *cultiver la terre* within the parameters of Madame de Genlis's model. The so-called 'non-human other' is employed, in both examples, as a means of re-establishing a sense of home and re-vivifying the environment. The *patrie* is not forgotten, but rather, its spatial imaginary is re-located in nature.

The natural world thus provides a certain rootedness in cultural memory for the characters populating Madame de Genlis's texts. Axel Goodbody, who explores the role of nature within cultural memory in 'Sense of Place and Lieu de Mémoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts', further stresses the connection between memory, nature, and origin.⁵⁶ This is brought out in the second volume of the *Maison rustique*, in a section devoted to trees and saplings. In an attempt to inspire a feeling of historical precedence, Madame de Genlis invokes the 'premiers rois de France' under whose reign 'les arbres

⁵⁵ *Botanique*, I. 116 (original emphasis). In I. 91, she makes further links between, nature, writing, home and *patrie* under the entry for 'Mûrier': 'En Angleterre, un ecclésiastique vint s'établir à Strafford [sic], patrie de Shakespeare; il acheta la maison et le jardin de ce poète tragique, et il abattit un mûrier que Shakespeare avait planté, ce qui causa la plus violente sédition dans la ville; on pillla la maison, le prêtre heureusement se sauva. On acheta le mûrier, et de son bois, on fit des tasses et des tabatières qui se vendirent ce qu'on voulut'.

⁵⁶ Axel Goodbody, 'Sense of Place and Lieu de Mémoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts', *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, pp. 55-67.

fruitiers étaient encore très rares’.⁵⁷ In addition to crystallising the link between the value of cultivated nature and the knowledge required to produce rarities such as fruit, she seeks to paint a picture of the early monarchy which emphasises their close relationship with the natural world. She refers to Charlemagne’s orchard at Paris which was described as ‘une chose curieuse’, as well as ‘le verger de Charles V [...] aussi cité dans l’histoire comme une chose extraordinaire’, and notes that these fruit trees were considered to be of such value that they featured on the palace inventory.⁵⁸ ‘François Ier’, she tells us, ‘ne dédaigna pas de s’occuper de la culture des arbres’.⁵⁹ There are more complicated rhetorical factors at work here than a simple desire to depict a favourable portrayal of the monarchy.

Madame de Genlis had been openly pro-revolution, had supported and claimed to have loved it ‘avec sincérité, surtout pendant les dix-huit premiers mois’ and, as we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, she retained strong republican opinions when confronted by the prospect of Louis XVIII’s ascent to the throne.⁶⁰ While it is possible that political and financial pressures influenced her actions and opinions, the repetition of certain core ethical and nature-related principles in her writing indicates a broader, overarching project: a rebalancing of social roles and a re-personalisation of the individual’s relationship with nature. The cultivation of fruit trees, for example, elevates the *paysan* to the status of a king and reduces the king to the position of an ordinary *paysan*, demonstrating that the rural model is applicable to all. Furthermore, as a biblical allusion, the fruit tree conjures an image of the tree of knowledge implicated in humankind’s original sin. Subsequently, the idea of a new-found self-awareness and the duty to care for and cultivate the earth rests on knowledge. This becomes the new standard of social equality.

As with ‘affectation’ in the *Dictionnaire critique*, artifice is shown to be a hollow display. The aesthetic and its connection to cultivation, is only valuable in so far as it relates to a moral or productive quality. This is shown, for example, in this same section of the *Maison rustique* relating to orchards. Madame de Genlis’s concern about the increasing fashion for English gardens is tempered by the fact that in them preference was shown for the ‘natural’, in opposition to the preference for symmetrical patterns typical of those in France. English gardens, although heavily manicured, were considered to be less artificial than those produced in France. Madame de Genlis’s hope is that:

⁵⁷ *Maison rustique*, II. 465.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, II. 466.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Précis de la conduite de Madame de Genlis depuis la Révolution*, p. 22.

En voyant former tant de jardins anglais, on aurait dû espérer qu'on formerait aussi des massifs d'arbres à fruits, et qu'à côté des chaumières, ou villages postiches, on ferait voir des vergers réels; mais on a préféré des arbres étrangers, stériles en fruits.⁶¹

In contrast to her portrayal of the early French kings, the use of the impersonal 'on' here implicates all members of society equally in this statement, yet alludes to the more contemporary trend amongst royalty and the nobility for contrived, yet aesthetically pleasing, cottages in landscaped surroundings as locations for amusement and escape from life in towns. Marie Antoinette's *hameau* is a key example of this.⁶² The productive value of the trees and the accompanying 'villages postiches' is limited: artifice is shown to be sterile. Returning to Blunt and Dowling's conception of home which emerges in opposition to 'foreign' and 'unhomely' practices, here Madame de Genlis's specification of 'arbres étrangers' accentuates the 'unhomely' quality of artifice. Instead, she seeks to resituate a sense of 'national memory' at a point of origin located decidedly before the artifice and luxurious ostentation characterising the lives of the nobility before the Revolution. The description of the fruit trees points backwards towards an age of kings different from those embroiled in the Revolution. This is a viewpoint which is also explicitly expressed by Volnis and his wife: the desire to a return to a simplified or 'natural' mode of living in the rural environment.

In his article, Goodbody observes that it is 'striking how often literary representations of nature appear within recollections of childhood, or more broadly in the context of acts of remembering'.⁶³ This is also a feature of Madame de Genlis's writing which contributes to the development of an overarching conception of origin, home, and nature. In her *Mémoires inédits*, she recalls walking with her governess, Mademoiselle de Mars, as a girl, and delighting in the natural world as a source of aesthetic pleasure and spirituality:

Nous n'avions nulle idée de botanique et d'histoire naturelle; mais nous admirions avec extase les cieux, les arbres, les fleurs, comme preuves de l'existence de Dieu et comme ses ouvrages, et cette idée animait et embellissait pour nous toute la nature entière.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Maison rustique*, II. 468.

⁶² See Meredith Martin, *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 160.

⁶³ Goodbody, 'Sense of Place and Lieu de Mémoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts', p. 55.

⁶⁴ *Mémoires inédits*, I. 29.

Attention is drawn to botany and natural history as disciplines which are essential to a comprehensive understanding of the natural world as a source of aesthetic, spiritual, and material value here, and throughout Madame de Genlis's texts – the *Botanique*, *Jeux champêtres des enfants*, and the *Herbier moral* are key examples of this. In this particular quotation, nature has an explicit spiritual and aesthetic value, which serves to animate the natural world and promotes a certain amount of bio-centric, as opposed to purely anthropocentric, value. A relationship with nature, and therefore with God, brings the non-human other to life. Without having been educated about either botany or natural history, for her, recognition of intrinsic value in nature is intuitive.⁶⁵ Human beings' intuitive understanding of the natural world is couched in her rhetorical framing of 'le naturel'. Later in life, she would not only acquire a vast knowledge of these subjects and incorporate her learning into her fictional texts, but also increase their symbolism in cultural memory, by attaching memories to plants – 'j'ai trouvé quelque chose d'agréable dans l'idée d'attacher un souvenir à presque toutes les fleurs' – in both the *Herbier moral* and the *Botanique*.⁶⁶ These texts, in addition to the *Maison rustique* and *Jeux champêtres des enfants*, emphasise the socio-cultural value of the natural world as a pedagogical, and perhaps more importantly, transformative social tool.⁶⁷

'In almost every period since the Renaissance', writes Bookchin, 'a very close link has existed between radical advances in the natural sciences and upheavals in social thought'.⁶⁸ This is especially true of Enlightenment thinking, moving into the early nineteenth century, and is discernable throughout Madame de Genlis's texts. In the preface to the *Maison rustique*, for example, she underlines the incorporation of explanatory notes into the text, a common feature of her writing:

Quelques notes explicatives sur des choses qui tiennent à l'histoire naturelle, afin que tout soit clair, et que les jeunes personnes qui liront cet ouvrage ne soient pas arrêtées par un mot ou par un fait qui pourraient leur être inconnus.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ In her *Mémoires inédits*, she comments on her lack of formal education, stating, however, that her father tried to help her overcome her fear of insects and of creatures in nature more generally: 'j'avais horreur de tous les insectes, surtout des araignées et des crapauds; je craignais aussi les souris, je fus obligée d'en élever une [...]. Il m'ordonnait sans cesse de prendre avec mes doigts des araignées, et de tenir des crapauds dans mes mains' (I. 27).

⁶⁶ *Botanique*, I. i.

⁶⁷ In the preface to the *Jeux champêtres des enfants*, Madame de Genlis claims that her intention is to inspire young readers to acquire 'le goût de cette science charmante [la botanique]', and to 'exciter la curiosité de mes jeunes lecteurs sur les prodiges si multiples que présente l'Histoire Naturelle' (p. vii).

⁶⁸ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) cited in *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, ed. by Janet Biehl (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 31.

⁶⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. xv-xvi. In the preface to *Les Veillées du château*, she also claims that the study of natural history has formed the inspiration behind a number of the tales in the volume, in particular, 'Alphonse et

Thus, readers are not necessarily hindered by the limitations of their education, and they may well already have an intuitive appreciation of nature. The rural model, however, if it is to be effective, must provide a certain level of education beyond the purely aesthetic and spiritual, it must also be productive and based on a long legacy of factual or practical knowledge. The all-encompassing pedagogical content of the rural model affords Madame de Genlis the opportunity to endorse its three core dimensions – corresponding to Kirkham’s tripartite imperative of re-personalising, re-sacralising, and re-spiritualising the world – and thus to legitimise the nature as *oikos* approach, at a time when the threat of industrialisation and rural exodus was increasing. In this way, she brings out the vital contrast between intuitive appreciation of nature and superstition, which has important consequences for the social construction of the rural community.

A blend of fiction and non-fiction is used to draw this aspect out further in the *Maison rustique* and *Les Veillées du château*. In the latter, for example, she details how the children are in awe of the fairy-tale related to them by their mother, Madame de Clémire. A series of enchanted occurrences provide amusement for them, but at the end of the story it is revealed that all of these magical incidents have an entirely rational, and natural, explanation. In ‘Alphonse et Dalinde’, a ‘globe de feu’ is revealed to be ‘un météore’, while a ‘tremblement de terre’, a ‘volcan’, and an ‘écho’ feature in the tale as supernatural phenomena which are eventually explained by science.⁷⁰ Magic, the fundamental aim of which, according to E. M. Butler, is ‘to impose the human will on nature, on man or on the supernatural world in order to master them’, has no place in Madame de Genlis’s model.⁷¹ While she expects that humankind should impose its will on nature, it should do so in such a way as to maintain respect for the environment as a sustainable and ecological resource.

In addition to this, it is a means of differentiating her own societal project from that of the *philosophes*, which she saw as inherently destructive. Positioning herself against them, she consequently opposes their faith in natural science alone as a panacea for social discord because it is detached from the arts and religion. While they believed that religion was a catalyst for the development of superstition, she affirmed her desire to eradicate the superstition which was rife in the rural community, stating in the *Étude du cœur humain* that

Dalinde, ou la Féerie de l’art et la nature’: ‘le goût de l’Histoire Naturelle suffirait seul pour rendre agréable le séjour de la campagne. Cette idée m’a fait imaginer le conte intitulé *Alphonse et Dalinde, ou la Féerie de l’art et la nature*, ainsi des autres’ (I. viii).

⁷⁰ ‘Alphonse et Dalinde’, *Les Veillées du Château*, III. 339, 326, 368, 361.

⁷¹ E. M. Butler, *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1949), p. 3.

‘le peuple qui n’a point de religion tombe dans une superstition si déplorable’, confirming her belief that godless ignorance is the most socially corrosive force.⁷² As with the earlier example relating to ‘néologisme’, it is not, therefore, the dissemination of knowledge which causes her concern, but rather, the methods of education and in the hands of whom. Religion, science, and literature are not sufficient in themselves as isolated educational pursuits, but rather, a broad ‘ecological’ knowledge is the only viable option. It is therefore a combination of these disciplines that sit at the heart of the rural model. In an entry in the *Botanique*, relating to beliefs about the ‘noisetier’, for example, she observes that at the end of the last century:

la religion avait perdu presque tout son empire, et malgré les *progrès des sciences*; on a vu, dis-je, se multiplier de toutes parts les superstitions les plus absurdes, on a vu renaître la baguette divinatoire, et les prodiges des charlatans enthousiasmer une multitude de personnes.⁷³

Science alone cannot equip people to be at home in their communities, because it does not provide an adequate framework for understanding the natural world or religion – both of which discredit the existence of a divining rod and the implied sense of social freedom that it falsely suggests while calling for a broader pedagogical scope. Her view, once again, foreshadows conclusions reached by contemporary ecocritical scholars. As Kate Rigby suggests in ‘Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics’:

In order to create humane living spaces within which other-than-human entities might also thrive, we certainly need the guidance of the natural and technical sciences. Scientific and technical knowledge is nonetheless insufficient to the task of grounding an ethical relationship with other-than-human nature, let alone an ecological aesthetics: science might be able to define and limit conditions for healthy environments, but it cannot tell us why we might desire to share our living space with a diversity of plants and animals, or why we should treat them with respect. If we are to reposition ourselves as allies rather than conquerors of nature in the production of a newly ‘habitable earth’, we need to supplement the sciences with a different type of knowledge, premised not on objectification, but on recognition: a carnal kind of knowing, whereby we come to understand the other, if never fully, on the basis of a relationality that is given in and through our shared physical existence.⁷⁴

Madame de Genlis’s aim is not to conjure a world of illusion but rather to disclose the world of reality by balancing the known and the unknown elements of the natural world with both the real and the fictional. A liberal or interdisciplinary approach to education is required. She

⁷² *L’Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 26-27.

⁷³ *Botanique*, I. 99 (original emphasis).

⁷⁴ Kate Rigby, ‘Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics’, p. 141.

is staunch in her belief that ‘il faut une autre autorité que celle des sciences humaines, toujours sujettes à l’erreur, pour fixer parmi les hommes des opinions sages’.⁷⁵ Again, a subsequent section of this same passage in the *Botanique* reveals that a blinkered pursuit of a single kind of discipline leads to a distortion of what is natural:

Un sophiste savant est plus dangereux qu’un sophiste seulement littérateur, parce qu’il se trouve beaucoup moins de personnes en état de lui répondre et de réfuter ses arguments; d’ailleurs l’ennui, qui fait tomber dans la poussière les ouvrages de littérature, assure à ceux de science le suffrage des lecteurs ignorants ou paresseux: on ne lit point de tels livres, tout au plus on les parcourt; et pour en adopter les résultats les plus dangereux et les plus absurdes, il suffit à la plupart des gens du monde de feuilleter un gros livre de ce genre, et de savoir que l’auteur est géomètre ou physicien.⁷⁶

Accordingly, she advocates neither a strong preference for science nor literature; rather, she anticipates a socio-cultural divide which has become established between the sciences and the arts, an understanding that is a point of emphasis in the ecocritical project. On this subject, Laura Dassow Walls, in ‘From the Modern to the Ecological: Latour on Waldon Pond’, comments:

So long as ecocritics are trapped in the ‘two cultures’ ideology that polarizes literature from science and human society from non-human nature, we will find it difficult to define a middle ground from which science and literature can be seen as partners, and humans and non-humans as agents, all cooperating to form the world we share.⁷⁷

The characters populating Madame de Genlis’s texts do not necessarily reach a point of societal equality, but the rural model proposes the means of working towards this goal, in the context of an ecological society, through a kind of productive, socio-environmental symbiotism. By creating the model itself, and giving it historical validity, she is able to make the link between past and present, and to promote the continuation of a tradition. In the preface to the *Maison rustique*, she alludes to Cicero persuading his son about the importance of an agricultural education, in order to emphasise the crucial link between social freedom and cultivating the land: ‘de tout ce qui peut être entrepris ou recherché, rien au monde n’est meilleur, plus utile, enfin plus digne d’un homme libre, que l’agriculture’.⁷⁸

The rural model allows for a certain amount of social freedom, but only within the

⁷⁵ *Botanique*, I. 99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 99-100.

⁷⁷ Laura Dassow Walls, ‘From the Modern to the Ecological: Latour on Waldon Pond’, *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ *Maison rustique*, I. ix.

confines of a community which is rooted in or tied to the cultivation of the land. In this sense, there is no room for individualism – that is, for the individual to act as a separate self, for freedom in the rural community exists only in so far as it is tied to a relationship with others as well as the environment. In adapting to the rural model, Madame de Genlis appeals to the reader's presumed desire to become part of this community, as well as to belong to the society of authors of texts of natural history whose work inspired the *Maison rustique*:

On ne peut lire sans reconnaissance, cet immense recueil, composé par une société si respectable d'écrivains réunis, non pour obtenir de vains applaudissements, mais pour éclairer leurs concitoyens de toutes les classes, et même les hommes de tous les pays, sur des intérêts si réels et si précieux.⁷⁹

This 'society' of authors is united through their understanding of nature as home. They write clearly and concisely with the intent of enlightening their fellow citizens, and even the citizens of the world, with practical knowledge about nature and natural history. In conveying the importance of the bond between humankind and the environment, their purpose exceeds a mere aspiration to receive praise, and thus the rural model is viewed as a valuable tool for social transformation: the land is a priceless resource. These texts, like those of Madame de Genlis, form the basis of an instructional corpus which aims to promote an idealised world in which citizens are held accountable to a specific moral standard. In turn, truly moral citizens intuitively recognise the worth of such guidance:

Les bons citoyens, les appréciateurs du vrai mérite, ne prononceront jamais qu'avec vénération les noms respectables des Rozier, des Parmentier, des Chaptal, des Cadet de Vaux, et tant d'autres, qui se sont illustrés par des travaux d'autant plus estimables, qu'ils n'ont rien de brillant aux yeux des gens du monde, et que le plus pur amour du bien public a pu seul les faire entreprendre.⁸⁰

With the act of writing the *Maison rustique*, she places herself alongside these authors whose labour is born of 'le plus pur amour du bien public'; however, she distinguishes herself from other writers who might not necessarily possess the technical knowledge required to realise their ecologically sensitive ideals. Consequently, the *Maison rustique* extends the genre evoked by these names, employing fictional narrative in order to convey moral principles through instructional texts, which foster a more complete conception of home. Specifically, the rural model unites 'les bons citoyens' through their participation in an ideological

⁷⁹ Ibid., I. x.

⁸⁰ Ibid., I. xi.

understanding of home and the environment: practical application of technical instruction which positively transforms the spatial imaginary of the home. Accordingly, the technical knowledge and ability to understand and manipulate the land into a sustainable home is both the foundation and means through which a virtuous community is built – that is, a technical understanding creates a virtuous cycle between a ‘love of the land’ and ‘community’.

In terms of chronology and scale, the *Maison rustique* represents the architectural blueprint for the ideal country home, a dwelling that exists somewhere in between the extremes of the *château* and the *chaumière*. It supports the material and spiritual needs of its inhabitants: their educational needs, a space for forming social relationships, and its gardens producing food and medicinal plants. For Madame de Genlis, it is an amalgamation of the best features of the *château* and the *chaumière*. The inclusion of the *nouvelle* at the end of the book, which depicts ‘le modèle d’une ferme si intéressante et si parfaite’ to support the family unit, as well as the surrounding community, ensures that the full spectrum of agricultural productivity is met.⁸¹ The fusion of fictional narrative and direct instruction in this text contributes to the construction of a new spatial imaginary: ‘Ce ne sont point de froids raisonnements qui rendront les hommes meilleurs, ce sont des exemples frappants, des tableaux faits pour toucher et s’imprimer fortement dans l’imagination: c’est enfin la morale mise en action’.⁸² The rural model is a series of practical examples that enter the imagination and illustrate morality in action.⁸³ It is produced through the textual construction of home as a spatial imaginary inspired by nature.

THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY RURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A POST-FALL EDEN

Madame de Genlis’s rural model is conceived within an understanding of nature as divine. It is a spatial imaginary produced by a text which has the potential to generate a world saturated with its own aesthetic and ethical conditions: ultimately promoting the formation of a national identity. In ‘A Matter of Texts: A Material Intertextuality and Ecocritical Engagements with the Bible’, Anne Elvey describes the Bible as a ‘material artefact of

⁸¹ Ibid., I. xii-xiii. She stressed the veracity of the details of this novella, stating: ‘cette histoire touchante est vraie dans tous ses détails; cette personne, si digne de l’admiration des âmes élevées et sensibles, est encore jeune et belle; tous ceux qui la connaissent, trouveront le portrait de *Lucie* bien foible et bien au-dessous de l’original’, I. xiii.

⁸² *Les Veillées du château*, I. ix.

⁸³ See also Diderot’s *Pensées sur l’interprétation de la nature* (1753) in which he writes, by contrast, ‘hâtons nous de rendre la philosophie populaire’.

certain human cultures’ and as a ‘site of interconnectedness between plants, minerals, fossils; habitats and climates; bodies, breath, languages; oral and written traditions; societies and their stories; and the convergences and dissonances among these’.⁸⁴ The *Maison rustique* functions as a treasury of information akin to the Bible as well as an explicit reinterpretation of the story of Genesis, which represents the fall of French society. This section explores this duality and demonstrates how, in seeking to come to terms with the dramatic socio-political upheaval of the Revolution – and the violence and destruction which accompanied it – the textual infrastructure of Madame de Genlis’s rural model can be construed as ‘biblical’ in so far as it corresponds to Elvey’s notion of the ‘material artefact of culture’. As a product of post-Revolutionary culture, the *Maison rustique* is a text which promotes ecological convergences and dissonances across social hierarchies. Additionally, this section investigates Madame de Genlis’s appropriation of the biblical notion of post-banishment exile as a metaphor for the rehabilitation of *émigrés* and *paysans* in their *patrie*.

Perhaps more striking than the technical and ‘material’ aspects associated with her texts, however, is the manner in which the rural model encourages interdependency between humankind and nature, through a re-conceptualisation of the narrative of civilisation. By attributing increased socio-cultural and historical significance to the natural world, Madame de Genlis mirrors Murphy’s notion of the participation of the non-human other in cultural memory in a manner which incorporates Elvey’s notion of intertextuality. For Elvey, the Bible is a text which embodies cultural memory. In addition, she writes, the ‘production, reproduction, and transmission of Bibles require plants, animals and human labour, and since biblical texts have been interpreted to support both destruction of, and care for the earth, the Bible affects the unfolding of the material given’.⁸⁵ The ‘material given’ is defined by Elvey as the so-called ‘givenness’ of material phenomena – that which is necessary to produce and sustain ‘human-species’ life.⁸⁶ This is a useful way to conceptualise the rural model, conveyed through text, as having a profound impact on the ‘material given’, or productive rural environment. Applied to the notion of ‘home’, it can equally be translated into a consideration of the literal and figurative architectural dwelling as affecting its environment: the surrounding garden and land cultivated to produce and sustain human life.

As a book whose teachings were at the very centre of Enlightenment societal debate, it is unsurprising that the Bible should be a point of departure in ecocritical research for an

⁸⁴ Anne Elvey, ‘A Matter of Texts: A Material Intertextuality and Ecocritical Engagements with the Bible’, *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, pp. 181-83.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

exploration of humankind's relationship with nature.⁸⁷ The multiple possibilities of interpreting its message have led some ecocritics, such as Lynn White, to believe that it set the precedent for humankind's belief in its own superiority, as dominating the earth while others, such as Leopold, argue, for example, that 'individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong', although 'society [...] has not yet affirmed their belief'.⁸⁸ The inclusion of the 'ébenier' in the design for the chapel of the *Maison rustique*, amongst other examples, illustrates that the natural world occupies a prominent place in Madame de Genlis's conception of the tie between nature, humankind, and the divine. For her, the re-sacralised earth, to use Kirkham's term, affects its worth as a material, aesthetic, and spiritual resource. This forms part of a complicated tension between the valorisation of work – which may be interpreted as an attempt to normalise labour – or alternatively, as a means of bringing about social freedom within a community which is nevertheless interdependent.

The re-sacralisation of the natural world, viewed in this light, contributes to the construction of a myth of origin, recalling Andrew Schaap's notion of political reconciliation, as a point from which a community can understand itself to have originated, to unite communities across the nation, and finally, as a personal coping strategy. Contemplating the omnipotence of God, in the *Étude du cœur humain*, Madame de Genlis attempts to rationalise the existence of the natural as wild, uncultivated, and untamed:

Dieu, au lieu de faire des rochers, des carrières, pouvait meubler la terre de palais naturels, il pouvait polir et briller les mines d'or et de diamants, il pouvait donner aux productions sauvages des champs la même saveur que leur donne la culture; il ne l'a pas fait, pour laisser cet ouvrage à l'homme; ainsi donc la plante améliorée par la culture remplit mieux sa destination que celle qui, manquant de soin, s'altère et dégénère chaque jour.⁸⁹

The natural world, it seems, does have a specific role to play in the narrative of human civilisation and, like the *Maison rustique* itself, is a dwelling-place conducive to the education of humankind. Madame de Genlis stresses the value of cultivation, thereby illuminating the tension between economically divided social groups. Wealth is thus theoretically accessible to all: gold and diamonds can be obtained through industrious

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

⁸⁸ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 168. See Lynn White Jr's emphasis on Genesis 1. 26: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all earth', in 'Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 12-13.

application and the value of the ‘productions sauvages des champs’ is similarly increased through the act of cultivation. The use of a biblical paradigm provides an authoritative and a culturally validated strategy for ethical home-making practices. Humankind, banished from Eden, must work the land. Adam and Eve are told, ‘cursed is the ground because of you’, and it is ‘through painful toil’ that they will eat food from it all the days of their lives.⁹⁰ The quotation from the *Étude du cœur humain* already points towards a view of the natural world as a post-paradise. Rather than limit agricultural labour to the remit of the working population, this quotation, crucially, for this study, presents the natural world as an inclusive, interdependent, ecological community for all humankind.

Madame de Genlis’s model, very specifically, portrays the rural environment as a space for the work of cultivation of both human and nature equally. Through working the land, the perfectibility of humankind is possible. In the *Étude du cœur humain* she contends that ‘tout ce qui est dans la nature peut être perfectionné par l’industrie humaine’.⁹¹ This is reflected in the intellectual climate of the time, particularly in Revolutionary discourse, which questioned the socio-political disorder in France and how society had come to be in this state. Daniel Roche, in his discussion of the alienating effect of the city and of urban growth as the root of society’s misfortunes, paraphrases Rétif de la Bretonne when he asks, ‘how does it come about that Man is so easily perverted? Must he always, like the tree or the animal, inhabit the soil where he was born?’⁹² Madame de Genlis was also concerned with this question, which she addresses in her *Étude du cœur humain*, in her discussion of humankind as morally rooted in the *patrie*:

Les animaux transplantés loin du sol qui les a vu naître, ou périssent, ou ne sauraient se multiplier, mais l’homme, souverain de la terre créée pour lui, et qu’il a seul la puissance d’embellir ou de conquérir, peut sans doute vivre partout; en même temps Dieu veut qu’il aime et qu’il préfère sa patrie, car dans une terre étrangère, il perd toujours quelque chose de ses facultés morales ou physiques, il y languit s’il y conserve l’amour de la patrie; et s’il perd tout-à-fait ce noble sentiment, il prend une aigreur, une injustice qui obscurcissent ses lumières naturelles, et qui par conséquent nuisent à son esprit.⁹³

Roche explores the notion prevalent amongst writers of the time that, ‘in the city, decline was almost inevitable, and the path to prison or hospital was marked out, for man had broken the pact that bound him to Nature’.⁹⁴ Madame de Genlis suggests here that in breaking the pact

⁹⁰ Genesis 3. 16-18.

⁹¹ *L’Étude du cœur humain*, p. 12.

⁹² Roche, p. 49.

⁹³ *L’Étude du cœur humain*, ‘Les cinq premières semaines d’un journal écrit dans les Pyrénées’, p. 149.

⁹⁴ Roche, p. 49.

that tied it to its homeland, humankind loses its capacity to make moral decisions. This also echoes Rousseau's conception of humankind's bond with nature as summarised by Roche who explains that to leave the country 'was to lose one's sensitivity to the seasons, to climate and to growing things, it was "uprooting" in the full sense of the word, revealed in a less warm and lively relationship with other beings, usually ending in solitude'.⁹⁵

The protagonists of the *Maison rustique*, Volnis and his wife Elmire, represent her perspective on the social status of *émigrés* following the Revolution. They are implicated in a process of remembrance and forgetting akin to the construction of postcolonial narratives which evoke a sense of colonial guilt and Marsh and Frith's notion of territorial bereavements.⁹⁶ Volnis, for example, repositions himself as the guardian of the village, embodying in many ways the paradoxical figure of a mythical ancestor, founder, and perpetuator of the community – he has returned as the 'ami' of the people.⁹⁷ As an *émigré* who has metaphorically 'fallen' and is banished from the Eden-like garden of the *ancien régime*, he seeks socio-political reconciliation with the inhabitants of the village. The conceptual alignment of the razed village with the biblical story of original sin neutralises socio-political tensions: all are united in their loss and the land – the nation – is the common property to which all are equally entitled. However, social tensions rooted in economic reality must be dissipated before this ideological understanding can develop. It also reaffirms the importance of the land as the foundation of all ethical civilisation and as the foundation of 'home'.

In the same way that the story of the fall of man suggests that there is a universal ethical standard by which humankind is judged in relation to the environment, modern ecocritical scholars investigate this notion. In *Ecocriticism*, Garrard states that the 'poetics of authenticity assumes, against the evidence of ecology, that there is a fixed eternal standard we ought to try and meet'.⁹⁸ It implies that a truly natural world, akin to the biblical Eden, is an attainable state that can be realised. This standard has been the misconceived *telos* of literature and science, which eliminates the possibility of ecological harmony. From Garrard's perspective, Madame de Genlis works towards this impossible endpoint; however, the constructive orientation of her rural model creates a new space for the renewal of humankind's relationship with nature. Explicitly referring to Genesis, Volnis exclaims: 'Ici

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith, *France's Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and la Fracture Coloniale* (Plymouth: Lexington, 2011).

⁹⁷ *Maison rustique*, II. 4.

⁹⁸ Garrard, p. 204.

nous étions comme nos premiers pères, entourés de toutes les richesses de la création... les jardins ravissants d'Eden ont disparu et nous voilà sur une terre aride qu'il faut défricher'.⁹⁹ Regardless of her belief in the perfectibility of humankind, Madame de Genlis's practical model and worldly standards, which revolve around home-making practices, means that her framework is ultimately more compatible with contemporary social ecology. For example, Garrard proposes 'the poetics of responsibility' as a counter-argument to the 'poetics of authenticity', which:

recognises that every inflection of Earth is our inflection, every standard is our standard, and we should not disguise political decisions about the kind of world we want in either the discredited objectivity of natural order nor the subjective mystification of spiritual intuition.¹⁰⁰

Despite her participation in the creation of a model which aims at an ultimate ecological society, Madame de Genlis's rural model demystifies the natural world in a manner that is distinctly political and subjective. The focus on education is a means of re-appropriating the biblical myth and using the symbolic aspects of this story, such as the garden, as the foundation for a reconstructive project.

Paula Henderson indicates that the opening lines of Francis Bacon's well-known *Essay on Gardens* 'are among the most famous in garden history'.¹⁰¹ In it, Bacon states:

God Almighty first planted a garden, and indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures; it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man, without which building and palaces are but gross handyworks: and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely: as if gardening were the greater perfection.¹⁰²

From this perspective, the home cannot be viewed as a dwelling in isolation, but rather, must be seen as inevitably joined to the surrounding environment. Recalling the period before the Revolution, Volnis claims that his land in Burgundy was 'autrefois si belle et si bien cultivée'.¹⁰³ As he surveys the surrounding landscape and contemplates his uncertain future, Volnis must come to terms with the new world: 'chaque pas lui présente une affligeante

⁹⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. 13 (original ellipsis).

¹⁰⁰ Garrard, p. 204.

¹⁰¹ Paula Henderson, 'Sir Francis Bacon's Essay "Of Gardens" in Context', *Garden History*, vol 36, 1 (2008), 59-84 (p. 59).

¹⁰² Francis Bacon, 'Essay XLVI, of Gardens', *Bacon's Essays* (London: J.W. Parker & Son, 1856), p. 404.

¹⁰³ *Maison rustique*, I. 1.

réalité, remplaçant une douce illusion pour jamais anéantie'.¹⁰⁴ The burden of cultural memory influences his perception of the physical place and his ideas about this place: blending geographical reality and spatial imaginary. Madame de Genlis continually seeks ways to use the biblical allusion to create a sense of equality between members of the community and to eradicate stratification: Volnis and his family have been in exile, while the inhabitants of the village were also driven out, fleeing their territory: 'ils traversèrent en pleurant les champs fertilisés par eux'.¹⁰⁵ It is the loss of their labour – the work of their hands – which causes their distress: this is their primary loss, no mention is made of their cottages, which must now be reconstructed.

Continuing the depiction of a pre-Revolutionary Eden, Volnis refers to 'notre magnifique serre', the human-built, artificial display of dominance over the natural world through the showcase of exotic plants: 'où jouissant des plus belles productions de toutes les parties du monde, où nous enivrant de tous les parfums des Indes et de l'Arabie, nous avons passé de si délicieux moments'.¹⁰⁶ Volnis must renew the world by restoring Madame de Genlis's natural order, dispensing with artifice. This evokes notions of sustainability and conservation – the eternal standard that must be met and the belief in the benefit of 'natural' origin or native species. Madame de Genlis is constructing her own order, and through Volnis, anticipates ecocritical thought on responsibility, and once again, on the notion of 'world'. Arendt argues that:

To set the time aright means to renew the world, and this we can do because we all arrived at one time or another as newcomers in a world which was there before us and will still be there when we are gone, when we shall have left its burden to our successors.¹⁰⁷

Volnis is aware that he is preparing the agricultural inheritance of his children – 'vous allez fonder avec moi votre héritage' – and accepts a certain amount of responsibility for the occurrences of the Revolution.¹⁰⁸ To his wife he remarks: 'Mais soumettons-nous: n'avons-nous pas mérité, par trop d'imprévoyance, trop de goût pour le faste, d'être bannis, du moins pour un temps, du paradis terrestre?'.¹⁰⁹ They are culpable for their failure to have anticipated the consequences of a life of unsustainable luxury and ostentation. His explicit reference to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., I. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., I. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., I. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ *Maison rustique*, I. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., I. 13.

the ‘paradis terrestre’ not only galvanises the metaphorical comparison at hand but confers an ethical dimension which corresponds to the moral philosophy of the ecocritical project and its trenchant implications for social thought. It reflects discourse on being at home in the world – which comes not through dominating or exploiting, or even the act of aesthetic appreciation, but through caring and being cared for. This is an idea permeating the ethics of care, which bears similarities to the ecocritical project and, moreover, brings us back to Gélis and his idea of man mirroring nature and Garrard’s discussion of the poetics of responsibility. Care ethicist Milton Mayeroff states:

A man grows by becoming more honest with himself and more aware of the social and natural order of which he is part; in coming to see himself with a minimum of illusion, he also comes to appreciate better the objective structure of means and ends.¹¹⁰

Just as the original sin of eating the fruit of knowledge brought humankind self-awareness, a change in behaviour is brought about through the acquisition of knowledge. The purpose of the rural model is to impart an ethical version of this knowledge – again, understanding the *oikos*: knowledge of who or what the non-human other is, its powers and limitations, needs, and what is conducive to its growth – and how to respond and what one’s own limitations are. Volnis’s relationship with the natural world combines his scientific understanding of the environment with a spiritual or instinctive sense of value in nature. Finding his Burgundy *château* destroyed – ‘ce magnifique château dont les ruines même n’existent plus’ – after ten years in exile, he is able to perceive the utility of living reciprocally with nature and persuades his family that they will ultimately benefit from their circumstance.¹¹¹

Volnis reasons that ‘l’exposition’ of the previous *château* ‘en avait été mal choisie’, meaning that ‘la démolition nous est avantageuse, nous y gagnerons une habitation plus saine, plus gaie et plus commode’.¹¹² He explains to his family that ‘une maison entourée d’étangs, ou située au bas d’une montagne, ou immédiatement environnée d’ombrages, est toujours humide, et par conséquent malsaine; il faut aussi examiner la qualité de l’eau’.¹¹³ The action taken is consequently of a social nature, placing a certain amount of distance between the house and the village – because of the barrier of knowledge that separates them: ‘tous les paysans ont devant leurs maisons de grandes mares d’eaux croupissantes qui,

¹¹⁰ Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring* (New York: Perennial Library, 1972), p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Maison rustique*, I. 2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I. 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, I. 17.

desséchées par les chaleurs de l'été, rendent l'air excessivement malsain'.¹¹⁴ For the time being, they decide that it is beneficial to maintain a certain amount of space between 'l'habitation et le village, afin d'éviter la contagion des rougeoles, des fièvres rouges, etc., si communes parmi les paysans au printemps et en automne'.¹¹⁵ Knowledge separates social groups until such a time as it is possible to provide an environmental education for all.

Volnis and his family will no longer subscribe to the world of luxury, but, once their new home is built, will live ecologically, for society:

Nous ne vivrons plus pour la vanité, c'est-à-dire, pour briller aux yeux des indifférents; on ne citera point désormais notre château comme le plus magnifique de la province; mais nous ne ferons plus de dettes ruineuses pour y réunir de grands personnages qui nous apportaient tout l'ennui qu'entraînent la gêne et l'étiquette, nous n'y recevrons que de véritables amis: on ne vantera plus les merveilles de nos jardins; on n'y verra point de grottes humides, de rivières factices, d'eaux croupissantes, des tombeaux vides, des ruines sans souvenirs, des montagnes, des allées étroites et tortueuses qui rendent la promenade aussi fatigante qu'un pénible voyage; mais avec quelle joie nous recueillerons les fruits cultivés de nos mains!¹¹⁶

This quotation suggests a remapping of social networks onto a more simple and more natural mode of living – which, again, forms part of Madame de Genlis's framing of the natural as a construct – in addition to a dismissal of previous relationships of etiquette. Thus, Madame de Genlis offers a critique not just of pre-Revolutionary wealth and ostentation, but also of a kind of social diplomacy presented as false, and unnatural. Here, then, is an explicit example of Bookchin's argument relating to the social roots of environmental issues. In Madame de Genlis's texts, the prefiguring of socio-environmental issues is shown alongside disaffection for the artificial, as well as for the personal expenditure required to maintain such lavish displays of wealth. Volnis and his family will integrate themselves within a more ecologically aware community, adapting their mode of living to suit their environment:

Nous n'avions plus une somptueuse habitation; mais dans l'asile obscur que nous accordait l'hospitalité, de vains devoirs de bienséance et de société ne m'arrachaient point d'auprès de vous, l'ambition et la dissipation de la cour et du grand monde ne vous éloignaient point de moi.¹¹⁷

The natural world is a shelter which provides for all the family's needs. It is the space in which Volnis's family live and work, a specific mode of being which, for Madame de Genlis,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., I. 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., I. 16-17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., I. 12.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., I. 11.

requires them to re-personalise their relationship with the natural world. Volnis and his wife disassociate themselves from the ‘grand monde’ and redirect their attention to the local, rural community, a shift that highlights Madame de Genlis’s renewed communitarian social project.

COLONISING THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT

On the 21st of June 1800, following a period of approximately eight years in exile, Madame de Genlis was removed from the list of *émigrés* and was recalled to France.¹¹⁸ Returning to Paris, Madame de Genlis found her Parisian home changed beyond recognition. She had become a stranger in her own land:

Tout me paraissait nouveau; j’étais comme une étrangère que la curiosité force à chaque pas de s’arrêter. J’avais peine à me reconnaître dans les rues, dont presque tous les noms étaient changés; je trouvais des *philosophes* substitués aux *saints*; j’avais été préparée à cette métamorphose en lisant *l’Almanach national*, où j’avais vu les saints remplacés par les *sans-culottides* et par des *oignons*, des *choux*, du *fumier*, des *ânes*, des *cochons*, des *lièvres*, etc., etc.¹¹⁹

The new world is created through new signifiers. The power of words and their influence on the creation of national identity comes to the fore once again as streets are renamed and religious symbolism is replaced by secular emblems – which in this instance are synonymous with the natural world – common to all. Her self-appointed task, through her body of writing, is to reassign cultural significance to these new symbols, foreshadowing, to a great extent, Billig’s ‘flaggings’ of nationhood. The national landscape, seen through the eyes of this returned *émigré*, was one which had been dramatically altered, one which, for her, was characterised by ‘terrains incultes’, both literal and figurative.

These *terrains incultes*, depicted throughout her texts are evocative, once again, of a post-fall Eden and are shown to be in need of intensive social, cultural, as well as agricultural cultivation. In her own words, there is a pressing need to ‘défricher la terre’ in order to support a people in flux. *Défricher*, a term which is indicative of her desire to instigate this process of clearing and cultivating the land, denotes the process which renders it habitable,

¹¹⁸ See her *Mémoires inédits*. See also Violet Wyndham, *Madame de Genlis*, p. 189 and Philip Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor: Napoleon in Power 1799-1815* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), chapter 5.

¹¹⁹ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 85.

and renews its ecological value. The definition of *défricher* proposed in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1762) further supports this idea:

Il se dit d'une terre inculte dont on arrache les méchantes herbes, les arbres, les broussailles & les épines, pour la cultiver ensuite. *Défricher un champ. Défricher une terre. Défricher un héritage. Donner des terres à défricher dans des pays nouvellement découverts. Les anciens Moines de Saint Benoît ont défriché quantité de terres.* Il se dit figurément des choses que l'on commence à cultiver & à polir par l'étude. *Amyot est un des premiers qui ont défriché notre langue.*¹²⁰

In her texts, the act of clearing and cultivating the land becomes a socio-political tool associated with the dual notion of eliminating the old – the ‘méchantes herbes’ – and developing the new – in this case, ‘des pays nouvellement découverts’. It is equally attributed a metaphorical value through the notion that language itself may be subjected to this process of cultivation and perfection through study. However, it is not only newly discovered lands that are subject to being cleared and re-cultivated but also France itself, which leads Madame de Genlis's characters, such as Kerkalis in ‘Le Malencontreux’, to use the terminology of colonisation: imagining the cultivation of his homeland in France, he envisions ‘[sa] colonie naissante’.¹²¹ From an ecocritical perspective, this has implications for how colonisation is conceptualized and understood, for Madame de Genlis presents this practice as beneficial to society if it occurs within the context of a community, that is, a natural, communitarian framework. Conversely, colonisation, for her, is destructive when pursued by selfish individuals who are removed from a natural, moral order.

Placed alongside Kerkalis, Volnis, in the *Maison rustique*, is a counterpoint to this individualistic character: their respective approaches are different, with distinct social outcomes. Volnis, confronted with ‘une terre aride qu'il faut défricher’, works to become a citizen of the ‘land community’, satisfying the conditions of Leopold's ‘land ethic’, by helping to rebuild the village and re-establish the farmlands, while Kerkalis is motivated by economic self-interest.¹²² Both narratives, however, illuminate the difficulties of reconciling social status with culture and wealth in Madame de Genlis's writing. This has consequences for the way in which social freedom is understood and, subsequently, for the relationship between members of the community and the rural environment.

In the *Maison rustique*, she reminds her readers of the historical precedence for the act of clearing the land and its advantages for those involved in cultivation:

¹²⁰ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (original emphasis).

¹²¹ *Nouveaux contes moraux*, ‘Le Malencontreux’, II. 4-5.

¹²² *Maison rustique*, I. 13.

L'empereur Pertinax voulut que le champ laissé en friche, appartînt à celui qui le cultiverait; que celui qui le défricherait, fût exempt d'imposition pendant dix ans, et s'il était esclave, qu'il devînt libre. Beaucoup d'empereurs ont publié des lois de ce genre. Plusieurs de nos rois en ont fait de très bonnes aussi sur ce sujet, entre autres Henri le Grand. Louis XIV renouvela la loi de Pertinax, en permettant de mettre en valeur des terres abandonnées, sans être tenu de rembourser le propriétaire; il fit à cet égard d'autres bonnes lois.¹²³

The act of working and caring for the land entitles the labourer to both its material and economic privileges and ultimately, to ownership of the land. Cultivation, as a form of colonisation, consequently becomes linked with social freedom and productivity. As colonisers, *émigrés* are justified in their pursuits through their ability to read the landscape and imbue it with meaning. Madame de Genlis is careful to point out that both emperors and kings have supported this law and that the act itself is entirely natural. This act, drawing upon history and tradition, is, in this sense, authoritative, and binds citizens to their *patrie*. The nobility is portrayed as coloniser come to restore balance and to increase productivity. In a lengthy entry in the *Botanique* relating to *Légumes et fruits qui ne naissent point sur des arbres*, Madame de Genlis recounts the history of Isabella of Austria (1501 – 1526), Queen consort of Christian II of Denmark:

Cette princesse emmena avec elle une colonie de paysans, pour cultiver les légumes à la manière des Pays-Bas; établissement qui réussit parfaitement. Cette colonie champêtre s'établit vis-à-vis Copenhague, dans l'île d'Amac, qui, d'une lande stérile, devint, ce qu'elle est aujourd'hui, un jardin d'un aspect riant et d'un excellent produit.¹²⁴

In this quotation the implications of colonising one's own country with the intention of rebuilding the nation are regarded positively, as a productive exercise from which all may benefit. It prefigures discussion of colonial theory as an objective means of positing an anthropocentric ethic, since it sits alongside Leopold's edict that 'a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise'.¹²⁵ The *princesse* promotes stability by leading her own 'colonie de paysans' who work to produce a harvest which has given the 'lande stérile' new ecological value, as well as beauty. Correspondingly, in *L'Étude du cœur humain* the desire to clear the land is 'l'instinct naturel' which distinguishes man from 'des animaux'.¹²⁶ Humankind,

¹²³ Ibid., I. ix-x.

¹²⁴ *Botanique*, II. 270.

¹²⁵ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 262.

¹²⁶ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, p. 15.

regardless of rank, is thus united in this undertaking, and an appreciation of cultivation as both beautiful and productive, is intended to assist citizens in overcoming pre-Revolutionary social divides.

Preferring to look to the past for examples of selfless, ecologically generous leaders, Madame de Genlis struggles to contest a portrayal of the monarchy, and indeed of the nobility more generally, as affected and immoral. She persistently reaffirms the notion of the once righteous monarch or *seigneur* who is an able friend of the people, with a respect for nature and a deep understanding of the practical aspects of daily life. ‘Ainsi l’on voit qu’alors les princes et les héros savaient parfaitement les métiers de maçon, de charpentier, de menuisier, etc.’ she writes in an article on ‘les ouvrages des mains’.¹²⁷ Alluding to Pénélope and Ulysse and referring more specifically to the *bâton pastoral*, she continues:

Dans ces temps reculés, la lance de bois, la fronde, la massue, la houlette, la bêche, qu’un prince agriculteur, un guerrier avait fabriqué de ses propres mains, devenait dans sa famille un meuble respectable, un héritage précieux.¹²⁸

The ‘prince agriculteur’ is skilled and able to produce an heirloom from natural resources, the value of which is derived from the cultural and sentimental significance attached to it. Beyond this, however, the ‘prince agriculteur’ evokes yet another biblical link, for he is linked to the figure of Christ as carpenter. This is significant in Madame de Genlis’s writing as an attempt to reorient a largely ecocentric Greek mythology back towards a Christian perspective, especially in so far as it relates to colonisation, because Christ did not, like the Greek rulers or the Roman emperors, establish a following through violence and bloodshed, but rather like a farmer who cultivates the land. Jesus, telling the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast to the crowds of people, explains:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come perch in its branches.¹²⁹

The biblical representation of prosperity is couched in natural terms. Predestined, from this perspective, to work within the confines of an agricultural community, the reader must explore a philosophical paradox in Madame de Genlis’s texts, which governs humankind’s

¹²⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 34.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Matthew 13. 31-32.

condition. It is expressed as a desire to envisage social subjugation as part of a greater divine or moral purpose: the notion that all are equally united in exile upon the Earth, which must be cultivated. In *L'Étude du cœur humain*, she observes: 'Si la vie n'est qu'une épreuve, et la terre qu'un exil, l'homme doit être naturellement mélancolique; et il l'est en effet'.¹³⁰ This Romanticised view of the plight of man corresponds to the societal project of the rural model, which ultimately negates the right of the individual, promoting a hegemonic socio-cultural code.

In Madame de Genlis's writing the biblical allusion to the fall of humankind, the subsequent consideration of earth as exile, and eternal search for a 'promised land' or homeland, can be mapped onto the historiography of the Revolution.¹³¹ Baron Kerkalis in the 'Malencontreux' maintains that his late father 'n'avait qu'un goût, celui de l'agriculture, et qu'une occupation, celle de défricher les terrains incultes'.¹³² 'La Providence', he adds, 'l'avait sagement placé dans un pays rempli de landes; il acheta des champs immenses de bruyères, les cultiva avec succès, s'enrichit honorablement, et me laissa une fortune considérable'.¹³³ Kerkalis wishes to continue this tradition, in order to respect the memory of his father, but when he leaves his estate to visit his dying uncle, his journey is deemed to be 'une émigration', and his inheritance is confiscated by 'la nation'.¹³⁴ All are implicated in the 'sins' of the Revolution and this tale illuminates the culpability of both *paysan* and *émigré*, whose respective ignorance causes both groups to make poor social choices with regard to re-establishing social stability and agricultural productivity.

The *paysans*, for example, take offence when Kerkalis suggests the cultivation of acorns as a solution to famine – 'une espèce de gland qu'on faisait cuire comme des châtaignes' – after he discovers the success of this method in Spain. He explains, 'il me parut que cet aliment si simple pouvait, dans un temps de disette, suppléer au pain'.¹³⁵ The *paysans* cry out, 'comment, misérable aristocrate, nous ne sommes pour toi, que des pourceaux'.¹³⁶ It remains ambiguous as to whether Kerkalis's offensive suggestion is the product of ignorance, a detached sense of superiority or if he simply means well, but he claims to be unaware of the fact that raw acorns are commonly used as pig fodder in the French rural community. Accordingly, the peasants treat him with disdain, indicating the extent of the ideological

¹³⁰ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, p. 48.

¹³¹ See Genesis 15. 18-21; Numbers 32. 1-12.

¹³² 'Le Malencontreux', II. 2.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., II. 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid., II. 18.

¹³⁶ Ibid., II. 18 and II. 116.

lacuna between their respective knowledge and experience of the natural world. Elsewhere in the text, Kerkalis encounters some peasants who pelt him with stones because '[ses] promenades solitaires, [son] goût pour les plantes' lead them to suspect that he is 'un sorcier, ou du moins un espion'.¹³⁷ Kerkalis exhibits a lack of adequate, and moreover, equal knowledge of the natural world, which leads him to commit social transgressions. This tale emphasises the need to educate citizens in order to re-establish productive, rural communities. While Volnis fully integrates himself within the community and is directly involved in the process of reconstruction, Kerkalis's efforts are shown to be insufficient, owing to his lack of engagement with his home community. By contrast, Volnis's concern for his neighbours and respect for the agricultural heritage of the area forms a stable foundation for reconstruction. Addressing the inhabitants, he emphasises the importance of collaboration:

Je ne vous laisserai pas manquer d'ouvrage; je vais bâtir, je vais planter et défricher des champs devenus incultes, vous m'aidez dans mes travaux, je prendrai part aux vôtres, nous travaillerons avec vous au rétablissement du presbytère et du village; cette terre, jadis fertilisée par nous, reprendra bientôt toute sa fécondité: tandis que nous en étions bannis, elle n'a produit que des épines! La main de ses anciens possesseurs lui rendra ses richesses et sa beauté; mes amis, nous en jouirons doublement ensemble, en nous rappelant les temps du malheur et de la proscription!¹³⁸

With Volnis using his position and knowledge to guide the process of reassembling the village, the inhabitants will benefit from the reconstruction of their home as dwelling-space and as dwelling-place, since, in addition to rebuilding their cottages, all are equally implicated in the cultivation of the land. They will enjoy the fruits of its harvest, and come to appreciate the beauty of their production. They re-inherit the earth and extend the tradition of cultural memory which colours the history of the village. The rural model, put into practice, builds community.

Conversely, Kerkalis's attempt, which is not properly dedicated to *oikos*, to community or tradition, falters. Placing himself at the centre of his own narrative, rather than being engrained within it, Kerkalis perpetuates an individualist mentality that places him above the villagers: 'Mon imagination plaçait de distance en distance des hameaux et des villages; je croyais voir ma colonie naissante prospérer autour de moi, travailler avec ardeur, et m'enrichir en me bénissant'.¹³⁹ Here the returning *émigré* is seen as the coloniser who

¹³⁷ Ibid., II. 8.

¹³⁸ *Maison rustique*, II. 4.

¹³⁹ 'Malencontreux', II. 4-5.

dreams of establishing a community of productive workers whose labour will allow him to regain his wealth. Viewing himself as superior, Kerkalis equates clearing the land with the entitlement of nobility in a way that maintains social hierarchy. Ever conscious of the socio-economic status of the rural dwellers he happens upon, in Germany he describes ‘des grandes fermes, habitées par des riches paysans’, careful to refer to the country as ‘cet heureux pays où l’on voit une noblesse affable et pauvre, et des paysans riches et pleins d’urbanité’.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, while in England, he is surprised to see vast areas of overgrowth left uncultivated:

Je fis à mon guide plusieurs questions sur ces bruyères; il me répondit toujours que c’étaient les plaisirs du roi. J’imaginai que sa Majesté Britannique voulait défricher tous les terriens et les couvrir de cultures et de hameaux; ce qui me paraissait, en effet, un *vrai plaisir de roi*.¹⁴¹

In Kerkalis’s eyes, a true king does not permit economic mismanagement of his lands by allowing them to be untamed and uncultivated. Unlike Volnis, Kerkalis does not consider his plan from a philanthropic perspective, but believes his exploitive motives to be justified because of the potential to provide employment. This same tension is present in postcolonial and ecocritical discourse. Bookchin observes that ‘not until the emergence of capitalism did the peasant village and its cultural repertory disappear as the locus of rural life - a fact that will be of considerable importance when we consider humanity’s legacy of freedom’.¹⁴² Seen in this light, the village is inextricably linked with the notion of (inter)dependence within the rural community, which cannot support individualism. Volnis works to conserve cultural heritage while Kerkalis’s economic motives threaten socio-cultural, national unity.

In Madame de Genlis’s writing, ‘colonisation’ aims at establishing a natural community, pertaining to the act of clearing the land as a means of preserving tradition whilst renewing society in an ecologically sensitive manner. It re-organises socio-cultural, economic, and political hierarchies around knowledge, that is, the rural model itself, rather than basing them upon arbitrary positions of wealth and status attached to birth. From a biblical perspective, people, as sovereigns of the Earth which is created for them, can be considered natural colonisers, a role that is condoned only because they simultaneously inherit the Earth and share equally the responsibility of cultivating and preserving it as a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., II. 93 and II. 111.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., II. 43 (original emphasis).

¹⁴² Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), p. 130.

home. This model constitutes a return to the Promised Land as well as to the homeland, which, for Madame de Genlis, involves a renewed relationship with the natural world of one's *patrie*. The anonymous narrator of the fictional travel narrative, 'Cinq premières semaines d'un journal écrit dans les Pyrénées', taken from *Étude du cœur humain*, writes:

J'ai visité ce matin toutes mes possessions, j'ai parcouru tout mon empire, ce qui ne m'a pris que deux heures, et je ne désire un arpent de plus. J'ai trouvé dans mon verger, Mathieu qui travaillait avec une activité dont je ne le croyais plus susceptible; comme je remarquais qu'il n'avait pas eu le même courage en Amérique, il m'a répondu que l'on n'a point de cœur à labourer une terre étrangère, mais que l'on ne manque jamais de force pour cultiver sa terre natale.¹⁴³

The desire to cultivate one's homeland is presented as natural; furthermore, working the land is not a chore, for it re-establishes the bonds between citizens and their environment. Volnis, a character who returns to his roots and reconnects with nature as well as tradition, demonstrates how constructing a home, as well as a community, through the rural model, builds a sustainable nation in keeping with an ethos of social responsibility. Although he attempts to repair the social edifice, Kerkalis, on the other hand, strays from his homeland and ultimately fails to connect with the new citizens of the French nation, a failure that results from his inability to overcome his hierarchical bias and his detachment from nature as divine origin.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE RURAL DWELLING

According to Allan Braham's *The Architecture of the Enlightenment*: 'the close relationship between archaeology, engineering and garden design, however obscure it may seem today, would have appeared self-evident in eighteenth-century France, and it was indeed fundamental to the architecture of the period'.¹⁴⁴ Braham also emphasises the lack of work undertaken to advance scholarship on this subject: 'the development of the garden in late eighteenth-century France, which was important for architecture in relation to the works of Soufflot at Ménars and to Ledoux's whole conception of the role of his buildings', he suggests, 'is clear enough in principle but notoriously vague in detail and in its wide

¹⁴³ *Étude du cœur humain*, 'Les cinq premières semaines d'un journal écrit dans les Pyrénées', pp. 147-148.

¹⁴⁴ Allan Braham, *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 63.

historical ramifications – social, philosophical and political’.¹⁴⁵

The architecture of the rural home, in Madame de Genlis’s writing, is rooted in an appreciation of the natural world as a resource, and in its varied socio-political significance. It carries meaning and symbolism, responding to a commonly felt human desire, which, in this case, is Madame de Genlis’s desire to inspire self-sustainable, virtuous living, with social equality as its aim. Her portrayal of re-building the post-Revolutionary home, both literally and figuratively, can be read as a metaphor for the social edifice. Correspondingly, architectural vocabulary was being used in the political discourse of the period as a means of commenting on the re-building of the nation.

Braham suggests that the ‘reappraisal of tradition in a mood of optimism and apparent rationality’, which is to be found in ‘the pages of the *Encyclopédie*’, is reflected in the theory and practice of post-Revolutionary architecture.¹⁴⁶ He further describes the social transformation linked with revolution expressed in ‘the many new buildings which began to assume increasing importance – theatres and hospitals, law courts and prisons – and in the use to which artistry and knowledge could be put in distinguishing between buildings so varied in function’.¹⁴⁷ Reflecting this attitude, in instances where reconstruction is not possible in Madame de Genlis’s texts, dwellings become disassociated from their previous functions as they are adapted to suit post-Revolutionary thinking, and take on a new character. This idea is also articulated in present-day architectural discourse which illuminates the connection between dwellings, the social edifice and environment.

Architectural theorist Simon Unwin, for example, believes that humankind’s identification of and with place is essential to the definition of architecture: ‘the conceptual organisation of its parts into a whole’.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, identification of place and its capacity to provide a setting for home is crucial to understanding the relationship between people, space, and nation. He explores the idea that to make sense of the world around us humankind tells stories, while architects ‘do so in space and built form, “telling stories” non-verbally through the design of places and buildings’.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Sophia Psarra’s *Architecture and Narrative: the Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning* makes clear the structural and narrative conformity between architecture and literature, explaining that: ‘architecture carries content through the arrangement of spaces, materials, social relationships and the cultural purposes

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ Braham, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Simon Unwin, *Analysing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

with which it is invested. It is underpinned by agencies and systems of thought that are involved in its production'.¹⁵⁰ Madame de Genlis herself, in 'La Nouvelle poétique ou les deux amants rivaux de gloire' from the *Nouveaux contes moraux*, affirms that: 'le littérateur, comme l'architecte, varie à l'infini les plans de ses romans, en variant la distribution des appartements de son château'.¹⁵¹ Architecture exteriorises a social quality or characteristic which influences determinations of spaces and how they are used, just as literature captures its intricacies through the written word.

In a manner that echoes these theoretical understandings of architecture as sites of narrative, meaning and memory, Madame de Genlis uses the physical structure of the rural dwelling as a metaphor for society, which also occurs in the political sphere: the edifice and the architecture of civilisation are terms permeating nineteenth-century discourse. The *Dictionnaire critique*, for example, presents a fitting illustration of how spaces, once defined by the social status of those utilising them, become repositories of widespread social discord:

Le peuple français était plein de bonhomie et d'urbanité; il est devenu menaçant et séditieux: les discussions politiques agitent les esprits dans les boutiques, dans les cabarets, dans les cuisines, dans les antichambres, ainsi que dans les classes de collège et dans les salons: enfin, on trouvait jadis les plus agréables délasséments dans la société et dans la conversation.¹⁵²

Here, these spaces are in fact synonymous with 'société', which is itself manifested through words, and 'conversation'. Application of the rural model affords Madame de Genlis the opportunity to invest architectural spaces with new significance by recasting them in the natural world; to promote a spirit of fraternity by renewing the social functions of particular dwellings within the rural setting.

Indeed, a recent article by Carolina Armenteros suggests that Madame de Genlis's awareness of contemporary architecture – of Ledoux's work especially – may have influenced her imagining of a supposedly true story; the transformation of the ancestral *château* of the Lagaraye family into a hospice and community hospital – a narrative episode contained within *Adèle et Théodore*.¹⁵³ Following the death of their only daughter, Monsieur and Madame Lagaraye travel to Montpellier to dedicate themselves to the study of medicine, with the aim of building a hospice for the community. According to Armenteros, 'the

¹⁵⁰ Sophia Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1-2.

¹⁵¹ *Nouveaux contes moraux*, 'La Nouvelle poétique ou les deux amants rivaux de gloire', II. 341-342.

¹⁵² *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 5.

¹⁵³ Carolina Armenteros, 'The Political Thought of Madame de Genlis: Rousseau's Royalist Legacy', p. 97.

community of Lagaraye is possibly inspired by the Royal Saltworks of Arc-et-Senans, built in 1774-1779', Ledoux's masterpiece'.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Luc Gruson, in his article on Ledoux's architecture asserts that the project was an opportunity for Ledoux to apply a number of his innovative ideas relating to 'economical organisation and social living'.¹⁵⁵ This is an objective mirrored by the rural model and which is ever-present in Madame de Genlis's overarching societal strategy for national reconstruction.

Although her familiarity with the work of Ledoux has not been confirmed, Madame de Genlis was undoubtedly aware of the writings of Italian architect Francesco Milizia (1725-1798), who presents a similar social vision which influences the content of her texts. Gathered together at the end of the third volume of *Les Veillées du château* is a compilation of 'notes explicatives' relating to the history of building and architecture. It is intended as a supplementary educational resource for the readers, to support their understanding of the frequent allusions to the different character and styles of buildings mentioned throughout the tales. Madame de Genlis makes no secret of the fact that, in collating these notes, she consulted Milizia's highly regarded *Les Vies des architectes anciens et modernes*, with extracts from the work forming a large proportion of her notes.¹⁵⁶ Milizia's work documents the changes to architectural style which have taken place over the course of history, but perhaps most importantly, his work provides the contextual background necessary to illuminate the social and political significance of these changes. 'Milizia sees a well-planned town that reflects the reasoned order, oriented towards the common good of an enlightened society, as the climax of architectural design' explains Bernd Evers.¹⁵⁷ Madame de Genlis's inclusion of these notes indicates her awareness of the importance of architecture as a medium for national reconstruction and of the need to draw attention to the significance of dwellings in her texts.

Madame de Genlis's wider acknowledgement of the effect of spaces on wellbeing, both individual and communal, is further evidenced in the *Maison rustique*. Reflections on the implications of some of the broader aspects of estate management, for example, in terms of the social impact of the individual's mode of living, lead to more thorough contemplation

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Luc Gruson, 'Claude Nicolas Ledoux, Visionary Architecture and Social Utopia', *International Conference of Territorial Intelligence*, (Besançon: France, 2008), 299-307.

¹⁵⁶ Francesco Milizia, *Le Vite di più celebri architetti d'ogni nazione e d'ogni tempo* (Rome: Stamparia di Paolo Giunchi Komarek, 1768). Madame de Genlis cites *Les Vies des architectes anciens et modernes, traduits de l'italien par M. Pingeron* as the version she used. His most important work is the *Principi di architettura civile* (1781). In it, he theorised what he considered to be the rational principles of architecture.

¹⁵⁷ Bernd Evers and Christoph Thoenes, *Architectural Theory: From the Renaissance to the Present: 89 Essays on 117 Treatises* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2003), p. 186.

of the benefits of living in the countryside, in contrast to the perceived immorality, pollution, and disease of the town – with its cramped spaces inspiring behavior which is ‘menaçant et séditieux’. Acknowledging problems in the urban world, Volnis, for example, criticises the manufacture of luxuries associated with maintaining a ‘public’ mode of living, in town; luxuries which only a relatively small proportion of society enjoy, have an extremely negative impact on the lives of numerous others, to the point of costing them their lives. He lists: ‘les uns condamnés à respirer toujours un air chargé de vapeurs vénéneuses et suffocantes’ to procure copper, ‘d’autres confinés dans les caves les plus humides’ to produce linen for clothes and for the household generally, ‘d’autres renfermés dans des fournaies ardentes [...] au péril de leur vie’ in the process of glass-making, ‘d’autres plongés dans les mers’ in search of pearls and finally, those ‘précipités dans les entrailles de la terre, pour y chercher des diamants’.¹⁵⁸ These dangerous, confined spaces, far removed from the sustainable, agricultural ideal, reveal the pitfalls of consumerism and the mode of living it demands. For Madame de Genlis, these activities produce little which could be of worth to a community whose interests are diverted from agriculture and the intrinsic value in the nature of their *patrie*.

The rural model, then, offers an educational framework which remains, outwardly, socially conservative, in that it is rooted in the tradition of agricultural labour. Furthermore, it offers a mode of living which is preferable to urban industrialisation, through its promise of the social freedoms associated with *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It is in this sense that Madame de Genlis can be viewed as corresponding to present day ecocritical tenets of social living. Edmund Burke, for example, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), uses the terminology of architectural discourse and warns that it is ‘with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice, which has answered with any tolerable degree, for ages, the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes’.¹⁵⁹ Authority is conferred by tradition: he describes the old constitution as a ‘noble and venerable castle’, and, for him, the state is an edifice with values to be preserved or repaired.¹⁶⁰ The rural model, while innovative, is nevertheless informed by tradition. For Madame de Genlis, the nineteenth-century rural home is founded upon a continual process of restoration and renovation, whereby ‘la nouveauté est piquante’, while, as she writes in the *Dictionnaire critique*:

¹⁵⁸ *Maison rustique*, I. 169.

¹⁵⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1951), p. 59.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

‘l’habitude a de la douceur et du charme’.¹⁶¹ Similarly, in the *Dictionnaire critique* the entry for *châteaux* depicts this edifice as a site of memory and community:

Ils sont tous détruits ces antiques monuments, qui retraçaient des souvenirs si grands et si doux! Les maisons de campagne ne les remplacent point; on n’y porte ni le même esprit ni les mêmes idées; on ne mène la *vie de château* dans ces maisons élégantes.¹⁶²

With the destruction of the *château* comes the undoing of a community predicated on French cultural memory. Madame de Genlis regrets the loss of the *château* because, within the framework of the rural model, it has the potential to become a bastion of tradition and the nerve centre of communal living in the rural landscape. She adds that, as a consequence of the destruction of grand, pre-Revolutionary edifices, ‘natural’ modes of living will be forgotten:

On ne sera plus accoutumé dès l’enfance à chérir l’ancienne demeure de ses pères, sentiment si naturel et premier amour de la patrie... les lieux qu’on habitera ne rappelleront plus d’intéressantes traditions de famille. Effacer le passé, c’est raccourcir la vie, c’est éteindre l’imagination, qui se livre rarement aux illusions de l’espérance sans le charme des souvenirs.¹⁶³

The notion of dwelling as both a physical space and geographical place is emphasised once again and associated with cultural memory. Family tradition, connected with the edifice and its location in the natural world, is cultivated over time through this relationship between humankind with nature. Stones salvaged from the ruins of once stately *châteaux* - recalling Edmund Burke’s notion of the state as an edifice with values to be preserved or repaired - and others, freshly quarried from the contemporary French state, newly established upon the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, represent Madame de Genlis’s aspirations for France. These are the literal and figurative building materials of a balanced ecological home.

In her *œuvre*, the *château* and *chaumière* represent a continued preoccupation with the rural home, and indeed with the rural community, as a space of gradual social integration and harmony. There is neither absolute dismissal of the former nor over-zealous commendation of the latter, instead, the *maison rustique* is a supple and variable amalgamation of these two distinct types of dwelling: the inclusive and progressive home which encourages social fluidity and the rehabilitation of citizens into society. Consequently, it is an edifice which engenders notions of national identity. Charles Estienne, in his own *Maison rustique* of 1564,

¹⁶¹ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 254.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, I. 87 (original italics).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

had already solidified the rural dimension of this rather flexible term, stating: ‘le nom de maison rustique est ferme, métairie ou héritage aux champs, nommez-le comme il vous plaira’.¹⁶⁴ The new ideal, embodied by the *maison rustique*, firmly situated in the agricultural realm, must retain characteristics of the past while embracing progress if it is to support an increased independence – equated with the new ideal of equality – within the community.

Jean Cuisenier’s study of Estienne’s text underlines the characteristics which mark the *maison rustique* as distinct from other rural dwellings: ‘la maison rustique devait se distinguer par l’architecture, en excluant tout effet de gloire et de somptuosité, toute fonction administrative’.¹⁶⁵ Already, in the sixteenth century, the outward appearance of the *maison rustique* is removed from a regulatory role, that is, one of ruling over the community. Cuisenier further argues that, ‘elle devrait se différencier par la destination, en dépouillant le logis de tout appareil seigneurial, en subordonnant l’aménagement du terroir aux ressources tirées non plus des arts de la capture, la chasse et la pêche, mais des arts de la culture, le labourage et le jardinage’.¹⁶⁶ His analysis emphasises the development of the *maison rustique* as distinct from seigneurial pursuits. It represents a movement towards rural arts, which are no longer the preserve of the nobility, particularly those which require a certain amount of cooperation with the surrounding landscape rather than simply dominance over the natural world, in addition to a sharing of natural resources. In Madame de Genlis’s writing, it represents an edifice of suitably moderate social standing, forming an ideal prototype for revolutionary principles put into practice in the rural community. Cuisenier’s study of Estienne’s *Maison rustique* concludes that the consummate mode of living requires the inhabitant to re-personalise their relationship with place and dwelling:

Il fallait donc tout à la fois repenser la composition des bâtiments et la destination des lieux, revoir le système des relations entre les uns et les autres, soumettre l’ensemble à l’unité d’un projet architectural.¹⁶⁷

Within the rural sphere, Madame de Genlis’s own reconfiguration of dwelling, place and social attribute is applied to various types of rural dwelling, including the cowshed, *chaumière* and *château*.

At one extreme is the cowshed. Delphine, the eponymous heroine of ‘Delphine, ou l’heureuse guérison’ in *Les Veillées du château*, is an example of a character who experiences

¹⁶⁴ Estienne, *Maison rustique*, p. 13

¹⁶⁵ Cuisenier, *La Maison rustique*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

the socially transformative power of coming to be at home in the natural world. When the reader first encounters Delphine it is clear that her temperament has been shaped by a life of privilege and frivolity in Paris: she is spoilt, vain, insolent, and affected. In desperation, her mother calls upon the ‘fameux médecin allemand’, Doctor Steinhouse, for help.¹⁶⁸ Having assessed his young patient and observed her tendencies towards both material and emotional excess of all kinds, he decides that she must leave Paris at once for the countryside: ‘le premier remède que je lui prescrirais, serait de passer huit mois dans une étable à vaches’.¹⁶⁹ Delphine’s conduct is transformed as a result of this experience and, gradually, through her discovery of intrinsic value in nature. Not only is she able to appreciate beauty in the natural world, but she also comes to understand the way in which her ‘natural’ surroundings promote virtuous conduct. Her quality of life, in addition to her social relations are greatly improved: ‘Delphine sentit une joie très vive en se voyant établie dans un appartement agréable et commode; sa fenêtre donnait sur la vallée; la beauté de la vue, la propreté du plancher et des meubles l’encharmaient’.¹⁷⁰ Having survived the rustic simplicity of life in the cowshed, Delphine is able to view her modest apartment with renewed perspective.

Simple homes such as these, and even those which are described as being newly constructed, are presented as structurally sound and inspire intellectual maturity. In tales such as the ‘Malencontreux’, the impoverished émigré Kerkalis is delighted to be presented with ‘une charmante maison, nouvellement bâtie’.¹⁷¹ It has been especially commissioned for him by an English gentleman, M. Merton, who shares with him ‘un goût passionné pour l’agriculture et pour les défrichements’.¹⁷² Kerkalis describes his new home in the following terms: ‘C’était, à l’extérieur, une très petite chaumière, mais l’intérieur réunissait tout ce que la plus élégante simplicité et le meilleur goût peuvent offrir de plus charmante et de plus recherché’.¹⁷³ A reformed Kerkalis, at the end of the tale, comes to understand his home in nature. As the proprietor of a home which is simple, elegant, and in the finest moral and aesthetic taste, his happiness is complete. His material and aesthetic needs have been met: ‘J’étais toujours en extase, en contemplant mes appartements, mes meubles, et surtout, mon bois, mon jardin et mon pré’.¹⁷⁴ He maintains an individualistic outlook, though this is tempered by the personal relationship he is able to cultivate with the natural world. This is

¹⁶⁸ *Les Veillées du château*, I. 21.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., I. 57.

¹⁷¹ ‘Le Malencontreux’, II. 94.

¹⁷² Ibid., II. 57.

¹⁷³ Ibid., II. 94.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., II. 97.

indicative of social compromise distilled through architecture in Madame de Genlis's writing: it is an attempt to contain the harmful debris of the dismantled social edifice by limiting the individual's property according to its communally sustainable possibilities. A further example of this is found in 'Olimpe et Théophile', a tale featured in *Les Veillées du château*. The inhabitants of the small town of Uzerche are united by the view of the rural landscape they share:

On remarque dans cette ville qu'il n'y a point d'habitant qui n'ait la vue de la rivière de sa maison ou de son jardin, et que chaque maison vue en perspective paraît être un petit château à l'antique avec des tourelles et des pavillons couverts d'ardoises.¹⁷⁵

Each of the houses – which are detached units with their own gardens – viewed from this perspective, appear to form part of a pre-Revolutionary *château*. Seen in this light, the *château* symbolises the ideal of communal living, which in the landscape of Uzerche is replicated through the shared perspective.

Elsewhere in the text, the depiction of the *château* at the very centre of the narrative must also accentuate its socially inclusive tradition within the rural community. It is one which has remained empty for a number of years. Financial circumstances lead the protagonists of the work to take up residence there once again and they anticipate it as being 'bien vilain' and 'bien triste'.¹⁷⁶ It proves to be 'très délabré', 'entouré d'étangs dont les rigueurs de la saison, la neige et les frimats, rendaient encore l'aspect plus agreste et plus sauvage'.¹⁷⁷ Without its inhabitants, it has ceased to be integral to community life. One of the ways in which the family seek to re-vitalise the community is through establishing a home in the *château*, in addition to making it a site of literature and learning: teaching about the natural world through the re-appropriation of the peasant *veillée*.¹⁷⁸ In this way, a process of restoration begins, compatible with Viollet-le-Duc's definition of *restaurer* proposed in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture*: 'Restaurer un édifice, ce n'est pas l'entretenir, le réparer ou le refaire, c'est le rétablir dans un état complet qui ne peut avoir jamais existé à un moment donné'.¹⁷⁹ A romanticisation of rural life, the restoration of a world that perhaps

¹⁷⁵ *Les Veillées du château*, III. 90-91.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 5.

¹⁷⁷ *Les Veillées du château*, I. 5 and I. 6-7. She places the volume in the context of others of this kind: 'Tout le monde connaît *Les Veillées de Thessalie*, de Mademoiselle de Lussan. C'est un recueil de contes fondés sur le sortilège et la magie' and Madame de Murat's *Voyage de Campagne*, another collection of tales: 'ce sont des personnes rassemblées à la campagne, et qui content des histoires' (in a footnote, I. vii).

¹⁷⁸ Lyons, p. 135.

¹⁷⁹ See the definition of 'Restauration' in Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e*, (Paris: A. Morel, 1869), VIII. 14. 'Le mot et la chose sont modernes': this constitutes

never existed, is that which allows Madame de Genlis's writings to contribute to the mythologising of the rural ideal.

Viollet-le-Duc's book, *Comment on construit une maison* (1873), bears remarkable similarities to the Genlisian *Maison rustique*, combining both narrative and practical instruction. The protagonist, Paul, is a young student who would like to build a new country home for his newly wed sister. His father, Monsieur de Gandelau, enlists the help of his nephew, Paul's older cousin Eugène, a practising architect. Together they explore the principles of building in detail, presented as lessons, just as in the *Maison rustique*. Paul initially suggests the more ambitious plan of tearing down the old family home and building a new home, suitable for the modern age. His parents are horrified, and Paul's father bemoans the destruction of an old edifice for the sake of novelty:

Combien ai-je vu de ces propriétaires qui, en détruisant la maison laissée par leurs pères, pour la remplacer par une habitation conforme, pensent-ils, aux exigences du moment, brisaient du même coup le lien qui rattachait leur famille aux humbles habitants du voisinage!¹⁸⁰

This sentiment, akin to that expressed by Madame de Genlis in her *Dictionnaire critique*, underlines the opposition between old and new values while demonstrating that both are necessary not only to French society, but also to community. Viollet-le-Duc presents a model which extends Madame de Genlis's attempt to reconcile tradition and progress through the architecture of the community. His protagonists subsequently begin to converse at length about the importance of the role that the *château* has historically played in the wider community:

Tous les habitants du pays, qui veulent bien l'appeler *le Château*, savent qu'ils y trouvent du pain quand ils en manquent, des vêtements pour leurs petits enfants, des conseils dans leur différends, et secours s'ils sont malades.¹⁸¹

The *château* is the epicentre of rural life: common to all in its capacity to bring together the people in both place and spirit, expanding the notion of home beyond the immediate family

a modern approach to restoration, he observes, for example, that, 'les Romaines resituaient mais ne restauraient pas, et la preuve, c'est que le latin n'a pas du mot qui correspond à notre mot restauration, suivant la signification qu'on lui donne aujourd'hui. Instaurare, reficere, renovare, ne veulent pas dire restaurer, mais rétablir, refaire à neuf', *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Viollet-le-Duc, this text was originally published as *Comment on construit une maison* (1873). Here, the edition used is entitled, *Histoire d'une maison: texte et dessins* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1873), p. 28.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26 (original emphasis).

unit. They discuss the merits of the old building, or rather, the way in which what are presently depicted as its faults by Paul, were in fact advantageous in the past:

Si la cuisine est un peu trop éloignée de la salle à manger, elle est assez vaste pour contenir les moissonneurs quand ils arrivent pour souper et les pasteurs quand ils viennent régler leurs comptes. Je ne me crois pas le droit de changer tout cela; car cette maison est la maison de tous ici, et tu ne dois pas oublier plus que moi qu'en 1793, mon grand-père y resta seul avec sa femme et mon père, sans être inquiétés, tandis que tous les châteaux voisins étaient abandonnés et pillés.¹⁸²

As an inclusive home Viollet-le-Duc's conception of the *château*, like that of Madame de Genlis, becomes the ethical heart of rural life, a socio-political reconfiguration that both draws upon and evolves traditional understandings of space, place, and meaning in architecture. His emphasis on social bonds and the welfare of the inhabitants of the rural community validates Madame de Genlis's depiction of the *château* at an earlier time and further develops her ideology. The architectural narrative of the *château* is thus elevated from one pertaining to the local, to one which may inspire change on a national level.

CONCLUSION

Peter Swirski's observation that 'like so many other things that human beings do naturally, universally, and transculturally, our aptitude for imagining other worlds is rooted in evolutionary adaptation', is a useful means of conceptualising Madame de Genlis's literary creation: her rural model.¹⁸³ As we have seen throughout this chapter, the construction of an ideal, post-Revolutionary world depends upon humankind's ability to re-configure its relationship with the natural world. In particular, this chapter has illustrated the way in which Madame de Genlis's texts present a reconstructive educational project which emphasises an understanding of nature as a means of coming to be at home in the natural world. The texts provide the ideological framework for the idealised rural home, inseparable from its surroundings which, reinforced by cultural traditions, becomes embedded in the imagination of the reader. Goodbody's research recognises that through the medium of literature, 'uniting and overlaying different semantic spheres in allegory and metaphor' is possible.¹⁸⁴ He further

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸³ Peter Swirski, *Of Literature and Knowledge: Explorations in Narrative Thought Experiments, Evolution and Game Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ Goodbody, 'Sense of Place and Lieu de Mémoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts', p. 59.

describes texts as ‘structures’, which ‘crystallize meaning around events, people and places, blend factual and textual recall with imagination’.¹⁸⁵ This is a principle at the heart of Madame de Genlis’s *œuvre*, as she moves seamlessly between fact and fiction, and creates texts which perform as the structural building blocks of the rural model itself. Most importantly for Goodbody, texts such as these are artefacts which function interactively, in the negotiation between past and present:

They evoke established memory patterns and interpretations of the past, and actualize them. This process of intertextual revisiting and reconfiguring of tropes, narratives and images plays a central role in the constant reshaping of public perceptions of nature and the environment.¹⁸⁶

Madame de Genlis’s texts inform the notion of a founding myth of rural community, as one which is tied to a biblical conception as a means of retaining authoritative traditions of the past in order to come to terms with the present. By evoking and re-appropriating established memory patterns of the pre-Revolutionary past, they function as artefacts which serve to reshape the citizen’s relationship to environment and nation.

In addition, the broad educational spectrum encompassed by Madame de Genlis’s rural model serves as an early indicator of the importance of including a range of subjects in order to establish a home in the natural world. Nature-orientated literature must therefore, as Kate Rigby suggests in ‘Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics’, promote awareness of the environment by re-orientating the humanities towards a more biocentric worldview. This has the effect of drawing attention to the way literature influences our understanding of the world. Rigby’s study of Böhme has its parallel in Madame de Genlis’s view of the perfectibility of humankind for, as Rigby observes, humanity faces the prospect of adapting non-human nature to suit the needs of human nature, which itself must be cultivated if it is to exist in an ecologically sensitive manner: ‘Corresponding to the project of transforming the “nature that we ourselves are not” into humane living space, Böhme identifies the cultivation of the “nature that we ourselves are” as an ethical “task”’.¹⁸⁷ This is in keeping with Madame de Genlis’s life-long project of moral writing.

The ethical project of re-personalising one’s relationship with nature is consequently a theme which pervades each of her texts: Madame de Genlis’s idealised France is in the very

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Rigby, ‘Gernot Böhme’s Ecological Aesthetics’, p. 143.

pages of her work – as she participates in the act of literary nation building. Her project is one of re-colonisation of the homeland through renewed interaction with nature and community, and reconstruction through the implementation of practical systems of knowledge. This is in keeping with Roche's sketch of the post-Revolutionary intellectual climate, a time when:

Writers revealed to their public the existence of a fearful barbarism which had to be civilised. In the face of troubles which had to be contained, repression and communion, education and assistance were the remedies constantly evoked by authors and political thinkers.¹⁸⁸

He further suggests that, at this time, 'a real popular mythology was being forged, with its roots in Marivaux, Rousseau in particular, and a few others [...] the true popular classes could only be found in the countryside'.¹⁸⁹ Madame de Genlis's rural model corresponds to the creation of an imaginative 'world' through literature – a spatial imaginary mapped onto a geographical reality. Murphy's conception of the experience of literature, as it relates to the environment, also captures an aspect of the rural model which mediates conceptions of nationhood through literature, for, as he suggests: 'Readers can [...] vicariously experience and engage with the perspectives of others [...] entertaining with themselves differing perceptions of reality and right behaviour without immediately threatening their own positions [...] in the world'.¹⁹⁰ In an effort to bring about societal change without overturning tradition, Madame de Genlis's rural model provides a balanced framework to promote ecological sensitivity and to re-stabilise the French nation.

¹⁸⁸ Roche, p. 42.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Murphy, p. 161.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE *OIKOS*

In the foreword to Edward T. Wimberley's *Nested Ecology: The Place of Humans in the Ecological Hierarchy*, John F. Haught argues that 'nature consists of communities within communities'.¹ While he acknowledges the ideological challenge of conceptualising nature as a form of 'nested ecology' – in opposition to conventional understandings of ecosystems which emphasise humankind's centrality – he affirms that, 'in the intellectual world, and in culture at large, holistic pictures of a dynamic, evolutionary, and richly layered universe are slowly and irreversibly replacing the more mechanistic, static, vertical and linear models that have been foundational to modern thought'.² The concept of 'nested ecology' thus exposes the complicated matrix of relationships which exists between, across, and within communities – extending over multiple vertical and horizontal axes. With this image in mind, a simplified view of humankind as the protagonist of its own isolated, sterile narrative can no longer offer adequate parameters for comprehending the complex web of relations between citizens and their environments.

Although not expressed through the terminology of 'nested ecology', such communities, and accompanying questions about how to preserve them, are to be found in Madame de Genlis's texts. While her writing is oriented towards an anthropocentric viewpoint, the rural model emphasises the significance of rural communities nested within the natural world, and ultimately, their place within the new nation. More than this, however, the rural model is both a response to the social, political, and economic crises of the Revolution and an attempt to repair fractured relationships between communities: between human and human, human and non-human, as well as between the various elements of the

¹ Edward T. Wimberley, *Nested Ecology: The Place of Humans in the Ecological Hierarchy* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. vii.

² Ibid., p. vii. A similar concept exists in the fields of ethics and political theory. Martha C. Nussbaum, for example, describes human beings as dwelling in multiple communities, which contribute to a nest-like model encompassing both the local and the greater, human community. In her discussion of cosmopolitanism, she writes: 'to be a citizen of the world, one does not, as the Stoics stress, need to give up local affiliations, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life. They suggest that we think of ourselves as being surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then, in order, one's neighbors or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen – and we can easily add to this list groups formed on the basis of ethnic, religious, linguistic, historical, professional and gender identities. Beyond all these circles is the largest one, that of humanity as a whole', in *Cultivating Humanity: Classical Defense of Liberal Reform in Education* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 60.

greater ecological community, that is, rural communities across geographical regions of France, and the state.

Traditional understandings of humankind's dominance over the natural world do not necessarily provide a suitable ethical framework for understanding the sets of relationships that Madame de Genlis and present-day ecocritical scholars are similarly seeking to re-conceptualise.³ Such anthropocentric assumptions made about humankind's superiority inevitably raise questions about social responsibility in societies attempting to redefine themselves in terms of natural, or organic, relationships. In drawing out issues of social responsibility, a further parallel arises between Madame de Genlis's writing and the ecocritical project, best corresponding, perhaps, to an idea explored by Wimberley in *Nested Ecology*. He explains that the challenge confronting those seeking to preserve 'the planet's fragile ecosystems' is how to go about 'inculcating a sense of ecological responsibility within individuals which will be predictably reflected in their behaviour'.⁴ Madame de Genlis's texts function as compendia of knowledge, setting out guidelines for morally responsible behaviour – the duties of the new citizen – in addition to presenting characters whose actions reinforce her ecologically sensitive, community-based message.

Therefore, while the first chapter of this thesis presented Madame de Genlis's rural model as an educational tool for establishing post-Revolutionary communities, this chapter investigates the notion of social responsibility as it pertains to members of rural communities in an altered France. It examines the way in which Madame de Genlis re-calibrates notions of social responsibility according to new ideas about equality, and individual freedoms, which are tied to the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. In doing so, she must reconcile the emerging concept of the self-sufficient individual with her own ideal of the *citoyen*, whom she holds to be an active – and morally responsible – member of the community. Similarly, she must balance the societal obligations of this ideal citizen with the demands of nature, such as those induced by familial bonds, since, in *Les Annales de la vertu*, she writes that 'les devoirs du citoyen sont grands et sacrés', and yet, in her view, 'ceux de la nature sont

³ According to Murray Bookchin in *The Ecology of Freedom*, despite being a keystone of Western thought, 'the notion that man is destined to dominate nature is by no means a universal feature of human culture' (p. 109). 'People in preliterate cultures viewed themselves not as the "lords of creation" (to borrow a phrase used by Christian millenarians) but as part of the natural world. They were neither above nature nor below it but within it. Their outlook was distinctly ecological, and from this outlook they almost unconsciously derived a body of values that influenced their behaviour toward individuals in their own communities and the world of life. [...] ecology knows no "kings of beasts" and no "lowly creatures" (such terms come from our own hierarchical mentality). Rather it deals with ecosystems in which living things are interdependent and play complementary roles in perpetuating the stability of the natural order' (p. 69).

⁴ Wimberley, p. 1.

davantage encore'.⁵ Establishing a sense of social responsibility which can begin to repair the damage to social structures once engrained in the national consciousness is achieved by rooting the social in nature, in the familiar, in community, and in the notion of home.

In *L'Étude du cœur humain*, for instance, she underlines her belief that 'l'homme est fait pour vivre avec ses semblables', and, moreover, that 'il a besoin de secours, de conseils et de confiance'.⁶ This sentiment is as deeply rooted in ancient philosophy as it is in more contemporary philosophical thinking. While conjuring an Aristotelian image of the human as a political animal, for example, it also echoes Roger Scruton's more recent reflections on the condition of humankind. In *The Meaning of Conservatism*, he observes that:

The condition of mankind requires that individuals, while they exist and act as autonomous beings, do so only because they can first identify themselves as something greater – as members of a society, group, class, state or nation, of some arrangement to which they may not attach a name, but which they recognize instinctively as home.⁷

Scruton's analysis evokes humankind's innate sense of the intrinsic value of human nature, which arises through identifying the familiar – that which suggests belonging, and 'home'. As with Madame de Genlis's 'homme', created to live with his 'semblables', the web of human relations itself inspires a tendency in human beings to act in a socially responsible manner, on both a local and national scale. Similarly, in her *Catéchisme de morale, contenant les devoirs de l'homme et du citoyen de quelque religion et de quelque nature qu'il soit* (1785), written twenty years prior to *L'Étude du cœur humain* – and which explicitly outlines the citizen's societal obligations – she had already described the quality of 'sociabilité', arising between men because of 'leur nature commune', in addition to the notion of 'humanité' – 'celle que la simple qualité d'hommes nous inspire pour nos semblables'.⁸ Nature itself, then, or rather, humankind's rootedness within the natural world, according to Madame de Genlis, is sufficient to produce an instinctive inclination for fellowship within a virtuous society.

In this same text, she further stresses, for example, that 'les mœurs sont aussi essentiels au bonheur de l'homme, que l'air à sa conservation'.⁹ The human being, for Madame de Genlis, is an intrinsically social creature, whose existence is predicated upon a

⁵ *Les Annales de la vertu* (Paris: M. Lambert & F. J. Baudouin, 1781), II. 21.

⁶ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 179-180.

⁷ Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 24.

⁸ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 109 and p. 110.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

state of dependency, and thus duty towards one another, which prompts a need for social responsibility, ‘de quelque religion et de quelque nature qu’il soit’. Moreover, she explicitly states that ‘l’état naturel des hommes entre eux est un état de société’, further expanding this idea to encompass the notion of dependency which is produced by material needs, adding: ‘elle est proprement une société de nécessité’, whereby a chain of reliance is created, ‘car tout nous prouve, soit nos besoins, soit nos facultés, et nos inclinations, qu’être sociable est un caractère essentiel à l’homme’.¹⁰ She believes that because of this deep-seated quality, ‘il est de son devoir de contribuer de tout son pouvoir à entretenir et à perfectionner cette société, en leur vouant des sentiments d’amitié et de bienveillance’.¹¹ Thus, Madame de Genlis engages with one of the key social questions of the age regarding humankind’s place in society, specifically relating to the possibility of (re)constructing a system of support akin to that which she believed to characterise certain pre-Revolutionary social hierarchies – particularly those existing within monastic, or rural, village communities.

Indeed, her emphasis on ‘amitié’ and ‘bienveillance’ implies that reformulated notions of social responsibility should be compatible with both the demands of the nation and those of nature, since it is indicative of her conviction that the social must be grounded in the natural: these are qualities which may only be developed in an environment of community and fellowship, as opposed to conditions which could be enforced by any national regulation or law. In this way her work touches on themes prevalent in social ecology, a theoretical framework which Bookchin presents as a means to ‘elaborate an educative dialectic that can deal with themes like democracy, aesthetics, philosophy, the State, politics and related so-called “superstructural” attributes of social and cultural life as integral parts of life and society’.¹² Familiarity with such ‘superstructural’ aspects, treated in each of Madame de Genlis’s texts, enhances citizens’ conception of social responsibility as a means of overcoming individual alienation within and from the *oikos*.

Madame de Genlis’s contemporary, Hegel, shows similar regard for the significance of natural bonds between human beings, by juxtaposing such social traits – deeming them integral to the ethical life of humankind – with those of civil society, which ‘tears the individual away from family ties, alienates the members of the family from one another, and

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 109. This is a precept put into practice by Volnis in the *Maison rustique* when he announces his plan to rebuild the razed village to the community: ‘je vais bâtir, je vais planter et défricher des champs devenues incultes, vous m’aidez dans mes travaux, je prendrai part aux vôtres’ (II. 4). Volnis intends to work in a spirit of cooperation with the villagers, for the benefit of all.

¹² Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 12.

recognises them as self-sufficient persons’.¹³ In Madame de Genlis’s texts, citizens must share equally their moral responsibility to cultivate the earth, not only in order to harvest its produce for the survival of the species, but also as a divinely inspired task which aims at the enlightened principle of the perfectibility of humankind.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HIERARCHY IN THE *OIKOS*

Revolutionary thinking prioritised equality over privilege and the regulation of the law over arbitrary power, and yet, distinctions of class and provincial barriers proved difficult to annihilate – social hierarchies, although often reformulated, remained largely intact in early nineteenth-century France.¹⁴ Indeed, Diderot’s entry for ‘agriculture’ in the *Encyclopédie* emphasises the connection between the cultivation of land and the development of social hierarchy itself, since ‘l’agriculture naquit avec les lois et la société; elle est contemporaine de la division des terres’.¹⁵ Thus, while the nested paradigm serves as a useful means of illuminating the movement towards decentralisation – which contemporary ecocritical scholars such as Dobson would argue is ‘fundamental to the Green vision of sustainable society’ – or indeed, towards a kind of ‘social ecology’, it also serves to underline the structural and status-related social tensions which must be resolved within, and across, each sphere of community.¹⁶

Hierarchy, for Bookchin, is a ‘strictly social term’ which ‘refers to institutionalized and highly ideological systems of command and obedience’.¹⁷ He observes that the word derives from ‘the ancient Greek term meaning “priestly forms of organization”’, and suggests that the ‘utmost havoc has been created by anthropomorphically applying the word hierarchy

¹³ Hegel, ‘Philosophy of Right: Ethical Right’, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 356–399 (§238, p. 373).

¹⁴ See François Auguste Mignet, *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (Paris: F.A. Mignet, 1824). McPhee, in *A Social History of France 1780–1880*, also reminds us that, following the Revolution, ‘despite the loss of seigneurial rights and, for émigrés, land, nobles remained at the pinnacle of landholding, and landholding remained the major source of wealth in France’ (p. 105).

¹⁵ Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 28 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton and Durand, 1751), I. 184. ARTFL EBook.

¹⁶ *The Green Reader: Essays toward a Sustainable Society*, ed. by Andrew Dobson (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), p. 73.

¹⁷ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 24. He also writes that, ‘without a clear insight into the nature of hierarchy and domination, we will not only fail to understand how the social and biotic interact with each other; we will fail to realize that the very idea of dominating nature first has its origins in the domination of human by human, and we will lose what little understanding we have of the social origin of our most serious ecological problems’, *Ibid.*, p. 34.

to various entities in nonhuman nature'.¹⁸ Madame de Genlis finds examples of social structures within the natural world which are not necessarily class-based but rather on hierarchies of social responsibility: 'toutes les abeilles, soit sauvages, soit domestiques, vivent en société, et forment entre-elles espèces de républiques, dont un chef unique dirige tous les individus'.¹⁹ Here, bees are anthropomorphically attributed a category-based social distinction, and are described as active members of a society which forms its own republic, led by a 'chef unique' who is duty-bound to act for the common good. Rather than justification for an absolute monarchy, Madame de Genlis links a productive community of bees with a form of government theoretically designed to permit the implementation of the libertarian principles of the Revolution.²⁰ Members of this society are thus entitled, as 'individus' – and moreover as citizens – to what are held to be natural rights, corresponding to those outlined in the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789).

The first article of this Revolutionary tract famously states that 'les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits', and additionally, that 'les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune'.²¹ In her *Catéchisme de morale*, Madame de Genlis upholds the principle of the 'utilité commune' through her affirmation that: 'tout homme qui devient membre d'une société civile, se donne à cette société avec tout ce qu'il possède, s'engage à en suivre les lois, et à concourir, autant qu'il pourra, à l'utilité commune'.²² While this sentiment does not preclude the possibility of equality, her use of language underlines the immature state of the 'société civile' – as a newly forming society which citizens must actively seek to join – and perpetuates the socio-economic differences already engrained within society. This is evoked through the notion of possession and the individual's potential to give within his means – in both a material and a spiritual sense – embodied by use of the verb 'pouvoir'. Social distinction is therefore deemed necessary by the author as a means of establishing the common good. The bees described in the *Maison rustique* are differentiated through their respective occupations, and their status as either 'sauvage' or 'domestique', despite sharing the objective of producing honey as a community. In this way, the beehive represents a productive social structure which permits certain

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. 340.

²⁰ Given the extent of her misfortunes during the Revolution, it is significant that, in the preface to *Les parvenus: ou, les aventures de Julien Delmours: écrites par lui* (Paris: Lecointe et Durey, 1825), Madame de Genlis writes: 'Je n'ai jamais critiqué contre ma conscience, ni écrit une seule phrase contre mes sentiments ou mes opinions' (p. v).

²¹ *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, ed. by Jean-Joseph Mounier (Versailles: Baudouin, 1789), p. 1.

²² *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 116.

freedoms – expressed as social differences – while simultaneously conserving a hierarchy retaining the basic organisational characteristics of the *ancien régime*. It functions as a kind of social support system in addition to being their home.

In her subsequent description of a particular kind of bee, ‘les faux-bourçons’, it is tempting to read justification or reasoning in nature for some of the more violent aspects of the Revolution, owing to the explicit language chosen to illustrate the unhappy fate of these bees, who, towards the end of the summer ‘sont exilés de la ruche, ou massacrés par les abeilles ouvrières’.²³ This description captures the experience of the nobility during the Terror, who, like Madame de Genlis herself, faced life in exile if fortunate enough to have been spared the guillotine.²⁴ The author, however, makes an important distinction between human and non-human nature through the example of the bee, which has consequences for the way in which her conception of social hierarchy is to be understood: ‘les abeilles ne sont que des instruments qui obéissent aveuglément à des lois générales et souveraines’, whereas, by contrast, ‘l’homme, créé libre et avec une âme immortelle, ne devait point avoir un instinct servile et mécanique’.²⁵ This is, perhaps surprisingly, very much akin to an idea which emerges from Bookchin’s study of social structures within ecology and how they relate to the notion of social responsibility:

Human societies stand in very marked contrast to animal communities. In the first place, animal communities are relatively fixed; some of the most ‘social’ of animals, such as the bee, behave overwhelmingly in response to the way they are genetically ‘programmed’, and their hives are simply large reproductive communities.²⁶

²³ *Maison rustique*, I. 342.

²⁴ Timothy Tackett in *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) claims that, at the height of the Terror, ‘at least 300,000 suspects had been arrested, awaiting trial in prison or guarded in their homes’. While he claims that ‘we will never know the precise death toll’, he gives an estimate of just under 17,000 based on ‘a careful count of all those executed through the judicial process’, though this figure does not include ‘executions without trial or deaths during incarceration’ (p. 330). In her *Mémoires inédites*, Madame de Genlis explains that her husband, Charles Alexis Brulart de Genlis, faced the guillotine willingly, as a martyr in favour of the Revolution, in October 1793. Her lover, Philippe Egalité, Duke of Chartres, shared his fate in the November of the same year. It is significant, however, that in her *Précis de la conduite de Madame de Genlis depuis la révolution*, she writes: ‘Il m’a toujours paru extravagant autant que coupable, de haïr son pays parce qu’on y était maltraité, car la nation n’a aucune part à l’injustice que peut éprouver un seul individu: cette injustice n’est commise que par le petit nombre des personnes qui gouvernent; et l’on croirait, au vif ressentiment de certains fugitifs contre tous les patriotes français, que la nation entière s’est assemblée uniquement pour prononcer la sentence de leur exil’ (p. 241). In wishing to view the nation as a system of support, Madame de Genlis implies here that social responsibility pertains to the individual. Furthermore, the very concept of the nation is one which is attributed importance as the locus of community, and held above the rights of the individual.

²⁵ *Maison rustique*, I. 340-341.

²⁶ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 24.

For Madame de Genlis, the utility of illustrating the societal tendencies of bees lies in demonstrating not only the existence of hierarchies in non-human nature, but also, the need to maintain them in order to preserve virtuous, rural communities.²⁷

Although ideally, in her view, citizens would cooperate and labour for the common good in a manner akin to the bee, they are unable to do so because of the very nature of their humanity: set apart from animals through their possession of an immortal soul. They are flawed, emotional beings who respond both consciously and instinctively to human and non-human nature. Madame Genlis thus apposes the ‘instinct servile et mécanique’ of the bees with her belief in humankind’s moral obligation to seek perfectibility. Her description of activities within the hive serves to further illuminate this point, when she reveals, for instance, that ‘le plus grand nombre des [abeilles] ouvrières est occupé à dresser, à limer, à polir ce qui est encore brut’, in order to ‘perfectionner le dedans des alvéoles’. The task of perfecting nature through cultivation is a pursuit entirely lacking in individual creativity and undertaken in a purely systematic fashion.²⁸ The republic of bees devotes itself to caring for the hive as *oikos* – renewing the ‘base de l’édifice’ of the ‘ruche’, which functions as an ecologically sustainable home and echoes the idea of nation as social edifice.²⁹ Similarly, she believes that humankind, united in its earthly exile, has been assigned the divine task of cultivating nature, be it human or non-human, also working, for example, to ‘polir et briller les mines d’or et de diamants’, to harvest the ‘productions sauvages des champs’, in addition to, by contrast, undertaking the work of self-improvement advocated in texts such as *L’Étude du cœur humain*, her *Catéchisme de morale* and the *Maison rustique*.³⁰

The republic of bees, as well as a number of non-human societal configurations named by Volnis in the *Maison rustique*, including the ‘nid d’oiseau, une fourmilière, une république de castors’, sits within a number of larger ecological communities, which serve as examples of organised social cooperation.³¹ The community of bees, in particular, then,

²⁷ See also Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1705), in which he presents principles of economic thought in reference to bees.

²⁸ *Maison rustique*, I. 349.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 348.

³⁰ *L’Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 12-13.

³¹ In the passage from which this quotation was extracted in the *Maison rustique*, Madame de Genlis forms a link between the mechanism of her watch, drawing attention to the science and art necessary to create such an object, and order in nature: ‘Quand vous regardez, mes enfants, le mécanisme de ma montre, vous n’êtes pas surpris de ne le point comprendre, vous ne vous extasiez point sur l’habileté de ces petites roues et de ces ressorts légers, qui produisent des mouvements si extraordinaires, si bien réglés et si utiles; vous n’admirez en cela que l’artiste ingénieux dont la science a tout fait. Le sage considère ainsi une ruche, un nid d’oiseau, une fourmilière, une république de castors; partout où il voit l’ordre, la divination, la science souveraine, il voit Dieu avec évidence; tous ces prodiges sont des manifestations divines. Contemplons-les avec reconnaissance, avec

nested within the greater ecological community, represents an ordered societal structure, which is, however, devoid of either religion, or the spiritual – this latter term denoting that which is characterised by Walter and Dorothy Schwarz as ‘the intuitive, the non-measurable, the aesthetic, the caring and the loving’.³² Humankind, by contrast, is shown to have been endowed with the capability of experiencing both religion, and the spiritual in nature, which manifests itself in Madame de Genlis’s writing as a capacity for creative imagination as an expression of freedom, and ultimately, nationhood. This is owing to the national characteristics which develop from shared cultural attributes. It is the re-spiritualisation of the natural world, or caring for the environment in a way which goes beyond satisfying immediate survival needs – which the ‘dominant industrial-materialist-scientific world view leaves out’ – that informs Madame de Genlis’s ecologically sensitive human communities.³³ Her texts offer more than the purely practical knowledge necessary to tend to bees and undertake the ‘récolte du miel’, construct a ‘grange à blé de quatre travées’ sufficient to support ‘un grand domaine’, or practise ‘médecine domestique’, to name but a few examples from the *Maison rustique*, providing, in addition, moral teachings and developing the reader’s appreciation of art and culture.³⁴

Practical, technical instruction is counterbalanced by an emphasis on moral behaviour within the web of human relations, in chapters such as ‘Du voisinage et de la considération en province’ in the *Maison rustique*, and ‘De la vertu et de la morale’ in *L’Étude du cœur humain*.³⁵ The social dynamic within the rural community, and the inevitable societal stratification which emerges according to various pre-existing economic, cultural and political divides, is, in Madame de Genlis’s writing, shaped by this spiritual quality or condition: the spiritual becomes synonymous with a moral approach. In *Les Mères rivales*, the author argues, for example, that, ‘pour assurer l’empire des lois équitables et bienfaisants, il faut appuyer ce code humain sur un code religieux’.³⁶ In Madame de Genlis’s view, it is possible for humankind to be ‘humain sans religion’, however, she emphasises that true

amour, notre admiration alors est un culte’, I. 357 (original emphasis). From this perspective, nature is productive, beautiful and inherently divine.

³² Schwarz and Schwarz, p. 235. This is also quoted in Dobson, p. 104.

³³ Ibid., p. 235.

³⁴ *Maison rustique*, I. 354, I. 157, I. xii. Additionally, in the *Botanique*, we find examples of information relating to the socio-cultural properties of honey. The author offers an anecdote, for instance, relating to the ancients and their awareness of ‘anagrammes’, and, in particular that Lycophron [...] ‘environ deux cent quatre-vingts ans avant Jésus-Christ, trouva dans le nom de Ptolomée, en grec, ces mots: *du miel*’ (I. 170-171).

³⁵ *Maison rustique*, II. 167, *L’Étude du cœur humain*, p. 82.

³⁶ *Les Mères rivales ou La Calomnie* (Paris: Chez F. T. de La Garde, 1800), p. 15.

understanding of nature, and the natural world, is mediated through God.³⁷ The bees, although considered by the author as divine creations, are neither virtuous nor immoral, and their place in the nested ecosphere is proportionate to their earthly, animalistic state.³⁸

Mediating a relationship with the natural world through the divine is a means for humankind better to understand their place in the greater ecosystem: the nested community is shown to be a mechanism of social order which has the potential to house further organisational structures such as institutions of learning and culture within the nation.³⁹ In *L'Étude du cœur humain*, Madame de Genlis draws out the spiritual difference which informs conventional understandings of dualism or separation between human beings and non-human creatures:

Il n'y a rien du physique dans une infinité de vertus, la reconnaissance, la libéralité, la noblesse, la délicatesse de sentiment, etc. Il y a du physique dans tous les vices; et l'esclave de ses sens n'a plus qu'une existence entièrement animale.⁴⁰

Vice is shown to be a negative character trait with physical, animalistic attributes and, consequently, possible material consequences for others and for the environment – we might think of greed engendered by consumerism and its ecological impact for instance – while virtuous qualities are largely embodied by a spiritual quality in the sense that they are intangible, non-measurable, and require what is almost an imaginative, socially constructed or learned appreciation which transcends the comprehension of the non-human other. Madame de Genlis does not dismantle the dualistic notion of humankind as superior to non-human creatures, but rather, through the idea that 'l'esclave de ses sens' has an 'existence entièrement animale', she reaffirms the idea that a re-spiritualised relationship with non-human nature can be of equal or greater value than one driven simply by base, material motives. This elevates the notion of the spiritual, as a mark of moral distinction within society, as a means of distinguishing between the members of a community, who are, unlike the 'esclave de ses sens', free to choose to belong.

It is therefore alongside her discussion of bees that Madame de Genlis professes her

³⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 57. She writes, 'on peut être humain et libéral sans religion; mais jamais la compassion naturelle ne produira ces actions, ces sacrifices, et les dévouements sublimes dont la piété offre une si grande multitude d'exemples', *ibid.*

³⁸ The bees have dominion over the flowers, using them as a resource, as Madame de Genlis indicates, for example, in the *Maison rustique*: 'Les abeilles, pour composer le cire, volent sur les fleurs de diverses plantes, [...] elle ramassent ensuite toute cette poussière' (I. 350).

³⁹ As will be demonstrated in a subsequent section of this chapter, literature, considered as a vehicle of social responsibility, is one such institution, founded upon a tradition of socio-cultural knowledge.

⁴⁰ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, p. 109.

belief in humankind's placement within a divine hierarchy, as servants of God. She argues: 'Dieu mit au fond de son cœur la pitié; voilà son instinct, sentiment sublime qui le distingue de tous les animaux, qui, privés d'âme et de liberté, ne pouvaient avoir besoin de pardon'.⁴¹ The need to be pardoned by a higher authority – to seek forgiveness – subjects humankind to what is, for Madame de Genlis, a natural, and moral, state of hierarchy.⁴² This once again reinforces her anthropocentrism – though this does not necessarily constitute an assertion of the superiority of humankind as such – through her affirmation of humankind's elevated position in the nested ecological model while simultaneously confirming its dependence on the natural world as a material and spiritual resource: 'tout est prodige dans la nature, parce que tout est l'ouvrage d'une intelligence suprême, au-dessus de toutes les conceptions humaines'.⁴³ The existence of an 'intelligence suprême', which directs human experience, validates humankind's role at the ethical centre of the nested community model; made in God's image, humankind is thus responsible for the governance of the ecological community, sharing the 'devoir de contribuer de tout son pouvoir à entretenir et à perfectionner cette société'.⁴⁴ Grounding the notion of community in a divine conception of nature allows Madame de Genlis to explore fully and come to terms with re-calibrated forms of hierarchy emerging in a nation under construction. As Robespierre notes, 'l'idée de l'Être Suprême et de l'immortalité de l'âme est un rappel continuel à la justice; elle est donc sociale et républicaine'.⁴⁵ From this understanding, the notion of an organic hierarchy is not only binding, but also divinely sanctioned, thereby reaffirming its function as an infrastructure for social responsibility: a 'rappel continuel à la justice' which undergirds liberal, republican communities. In addition, it cements the idea that human beings, through their moral duty to perfect nature, are simply *natura naturans* – nature taking its course – meaning that they are justified in their cultivation of the natural world.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Maison rustique*, I. 340-341.

⁴² Volnis further emphasises both the existence of and his position within the divine social hierarchy when he explains to his family: 'mes enfants, dans tout que je vais dire, n'admirez que le véritable auteur de ces merveilles; c'est Dieu que les opère, c'est Dieu qui dirige tout, qui fait tout', *Ibid.*, I. 341. In *Les Mères rivales*, we also find an example of proximity to nature as a path to a civilised human condition, as opposed to the deceptive trappings of perceived rational civility which Madame de Genlis identifies in enlightenment thought: 'Il faut au peuple une religion. Plus les hommes sont rapprochés de la nature, plus ils sentent ce besoin, ce désir sublime inspiré par l'espoir et par la reconnaissance. L'athéisme est un rêve monstrueux de l'homme civilisé, corrompu par l'orgueil; tous les sauvages ont établi parmi eux des cérémonies religieuses' (pp. 9-10).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I. 357. In this sense, humankind's privilege is limited, like the bees, since there are conceptions beyond their comprehension.

⁴⁴ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ See Maximilien Robespierre's speech to the National Convention, 7 May 1794, *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, ed. Laponneraye, 3 vols (Paris: Fauborg, 1840), III. 623.

⁴⁶ See Benedict de Spinoza's *Ethics* in which he examines the connection between God and Nature as *natura naturans* in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, ed. and trans. by Edwin

Humankind, as nature, is consequently tasked with cultivating nature, human and non-human, in a sustainable manner. This is an obligation that – if applied according to Madame de Genlis’s rural model – carries with it the potential to maintain the decentralised character of the nested ecological paradigm while simultaneously fostering a sense of divinely-inspired responsibility which extends beyond the local. The ‘sauvage’ of the *Étude du cœur humain*, for example, who has not come to recognise the divine in his environment ‘n’est qu’un homme dégradé, [...] il est esclave des préjugés les plus absurdes’, and consequently, ‘il a perdu l’instinct naturel qui pourrait encore le distinguer des animaux, celui de défricher la terre’.⁴⁷ In other words, without the desire to cultivate nature, human beings are displaced within the nested hierarchy on both a micro and macro level. Referring to the *sauvage* once again, she asks, ‘pourquoi voudrait-il envahir les champs qu’il dédaigne de cultiver?’⁴⁸ As *natura naturans*, human beings are not necessarily superior to non-human others, but ‘l’immortalité de l’âme’ distinguishes them as creative individuals, without ‘un instinct servile et mécanique’. In light of this, Bookchin’s affirmation that ‘hierarchy is not merely a social condition; it is also a state of consciousness, a sensibility toward phenomena at every level of personal and social experience’, illuminates the way in which culturally constructed notions of human and non-human nature saturate the very fabric of the ecosphere.⁴⁹ Madame de Genlis’s presentation of hierarchy, throughout her texts, is compatible with this idea. It is not limited to rank of birth or socio-economic status, but rather, entails a form of cultural knowledge constituting two very different sides of the same coin. On the one hand, inherited knowledge of the land passed down from generation to generation, and on the other, a learned awareness of literature and the arts.

Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 57-58. See also Lucia Lermond, *The Form of Man: Human Essence in Spinoza’s Ethic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988). This text investigates the difference between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*: ‘this distinction becomes the expression of an infinite potency of continuity and differentiation’ (p. 6).

⁴⁷ *Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 14 -15. She also affirms that the aim of the chapter in question is to paint a picture of the truly natural man: ‘je veux montrer le cœur humain tel qu’il serait s’il n’eût suivi que l’impulsion de la nature’ (p. 16). It is interesting to consider this notion in the light of Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782), which was written with a similar intention.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁹ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 69.

LABOUR AS A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES:

THE WORK OF PERFECTING NATURE

Bookchin too underlines humanity's 'emergence from and continuing interaction with nonhuman nature', not only as the means by which human beings 'maintain themselves materially', but also as one of the ways in which 'they become aware of themselves as individuals and as a very unique species'.⁵⁰ 'Call them *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, *homo economicus*, or what you will,' continues Bookchin,

their very humanness and the kinds of societies they create stem in large measure from their efforts to rework nonhuman nature into a habitat where they can live the 'good life' and hopefully contribute fruitfully to the enhancement of natural evolution'.⁵¹

In accordance with Madame de Genlis's rural model, attaining a state of 'natural' perfection – both of the self and in terms of the environment – requires intimate contact with the spiritual and the sacred in nature, that is, both a deep understanding of and communion with the rural environment, which grounds the inherently social quality of labour in the *oikos*. To borrow Bookchin's expression, this constitutes a type of 'philosophy of evolution' that transforms both 'nonhuman and human-made natures into a more complete nature that is conscious, thinking, and purposeful'.⁵² Indeed, as Volnis observes in the *Maison rustique*:

L'homme actif et laborieux n'est plus l'homme déchu; du moins, tout retrace autour de lui sa noble origine; il se ressaisit de son empire sur la création, il retrace dans les lieux qu'il habite l'image enchanteresse des jardins délicieux d'Eden!⁵³

In Madame de Genlis's portrayal, man acts and thinks in a purposeful manner, with the aim of re-creating a sacred environment. Cultivating the rural landscape forms part of the ongoing reconstruction of the *oikos* itself, that is, the restoration of humankind's original home in Eden. Humankind's 'noble origine' distinguishes it from non-human nature but agricultural labour is a mark of social distinction to which all may aspire. As members of a community who are 'actif[s] et laborieux', to regain control of 'son empire sur la création' is

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 11.

⁵³ *Maison rustique*, I. 170.

to participate in the process of cultivating a ‘more complete nature’: an idyllic pre-fall, pre-Revolutionary paradise.

Working towards this predetermined objective, in Madame de Genlis’s eyes, the ‘*homme de la nature*’ is therefore he who is best able to develop ‘ses facultés morales et physiques’ as ‘l’ouvrage le plus précieux de la Divinité’, while ‘*la brute*’, in contrast, ‘n’est donc pas *l’homme de la nature*, il n’en serait tout au plus qu’une ébauche imparfaite’.⁵⁴ In other words, labour is conceived of as an action which is not only productive in a material sense, but also spiritually, that is, extending beyond the purely physical into the aesthetic or cultural realm. According to this understanding, humanity, itself a divine work – ‘l’ouvrage le plus précieux’ – engaged in the task of cultivating nature, is embroiled in a cycle of labour as a form of creative production, which sits at the heart of societal tensions within the nested paradigm.

The manifold socio-cultural implications of this re-conceptualised notion of labour fuels societal tensions based around differences other than those of a purely socio-economic kind. Thus, the metaphorical image of the ‘brute’, or savage, as an incomplete sketch of the perfected man is indicative of emerging cultural divides across communities: evoking the displacement of social anxiety within the socio-cultural, and even the aesthetic realm.⁵⁵ The ‘ébauche’, which is far from being a completed work of art, reflects the chasm between the perfect and the imperfect: the educated and the uneducated, the productive and the unproductive – the social divide between those who are able to read a rural landscape and imbue it with meaning, whether this is in terms of its agricultural potential or symbolic value, and those who cannot. Productive nature, in both senses, is complete – consequently synonymous with the beautiful and the economical – a line of thought foreshadowing Oscar Wilde’s musings on ‘The Practical Application of the Principles of Æsthetic Theory’.⁵⁶ Wilde argues that ‘we do not want the rich to possess more beautiful things but the poor to create more beautiful things; for every man is poor who cannot create’.⁵⁷ Because Madame de

⁵⁴ *Étude du cœur humain*, p. 14, 13, 14 (original emphasis).

⁵⁵ Amy S. Wyngaard, in her book *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004) discusses both the peasant and the ‘noble’ savage as an invention of the Enlightenment, seeing the two figures as inextricably linked and embodying the contradiction between philosophy and practice and central to many Enlightenment constructions.

⁵⁶ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Practical Application of the Principles of Æsthetic Theory’, in *The Essays of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1916), p. 506. The original source of this quotation is a lecture delivered in America during Wilde’s tour in 1882 entitled ‘The Practical Application of the Principles of Æsthetic Theory to Exterior and Interior House Decoration, With Observations upon Dress and Personal Ornaments’. The earliest date on which it is known to have been given is May 11, 1882.

⁵⁷ Like Madame de Genlis, Wilde connects individuality, aesthetics and the state of the nation as a means of commenting on social upheaval: ‘And lastly, you require a sense of individualism about each man and woman,

Genlis presents labour as a construct, which can be productive in both a material and an abstract sense – that is, spiritually or culturally – within the rural model it becomes a means of securing socio-cultural status in a socio-economically fractured nation.

This is particularly apparent in texts where characters demonstrate concern for individualism as an expression of their superiority through the work of (re)building, a concept which is shown to restrict the development of inclusive communities. Individualism, which is presented as a pernicious socio-cultural ideology when detached from communitarian traditions and beliefs can, in Madame de Genlis's texts, cause physical damage to the natural world and impair the communal bonds that constitute natural, moral order. A key example is to be found in the *comédie* of the 'Vrai sage' in the *Théâtre d'éducation* (1779-1780). Ophémon, a retired merchant, in dialogue with his neighbour – who is known simply as the Chevalier – compliments him on his *château*, which he says 'est superbe... et meublé avec une magnificence', to which the Chevalier replies, with irony, that 'Il n'est pas logeable... je le fais abattre...'.⁵⁸ The Chevalier explains his plan to renovate the property and the land surrounding it, stating: 'C'est un meurtre, n'est-ce pas? Et ces jardins, objets de l'admiration de la province, cette belle allée d'ormes, ces majestueux maronniers; je fais couper tout cela... Ne suis-je pas bien impitoyable? Bien original surtout?'.⁵⁹ Demonstrating his socio-cultural superiority through his individualistic desire to be original, the Chevalier plans the work of rebuilding his home, at the expense of the community which derives aesthetic pleasure from the gardens, from the 'belle allée d'ormes', and the 'majestueux marronniers'. Madame de Genlis illustrates the consequences of such actions, for the wider community, across her body of writing.

The *Botanique*, published much later than the *Théâtre d'éducation*, in 1810, for example, provides information intended to enhance readers' understanding of non-human nature, encouraging them to cherish it and to understand its significance in the narrative of human history. Had the Chevalier had access to such a text, he would have known, for example, that the 'ormes' he intends to cut down have importance in Greek mythology, especially relating to story of Achilles, and additionally, that:

for this is the essence of art – a desire on the part of man to express himself in the noblest way possible. And this is the reason that the grandest art of the world always came from a republic: Athens, Venice, and Florence – there were no kings there and so their art was as noble and simple as sincere. But if you want to know what kind of art the folly of kings will impose on a country look at the decorative art of France under the grand monarque, under Louis the Fourteenth; the gaudy gilt furniture writhing under a sense of its own horror and ugliness, with a nymph smirking at every angle and a dragon mouthing on every claw. Unreal and monstrous art this, and fit only for such periwigged pomposities as the nobility of France at that time, but not at all fit for you or me', *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Théâtre d'éducation*, 'Le vrai sage', V. 261.

⁵⁹ *L'Étude du cœur humain*, p. 261.

Anciennement en France, les chasseurs appendaient aux portes des églises les dépouilles des animaux qu'ils avaient tués. Ensuite, pour mettre plus commodément ces trophées, on imagina de planter un orme devant chaque église. Enfin, on supprima ces espèces d'offrandes, mais les ormes durèrent longtemps après l'abolition de cette coutume; on conserva même l'usage de planter des ormes en face des églises de village'.⁶⁰

The 'orme' therefore enjoys socio-cultural distinction, a connection to society's relationship with divine Providence mediated through non-human nature. The Chevalier is either unaware or chooses to ignore the socio-cultural significance of his property and its tradition in the history of the village; thus, he is no better than the 'brute' who does not know his place in the communal environment. He is alienated from the *oikos*, which is, in this case, a site of cultural memory in the community. His work in and on the land is neither productive nor beautiful.

Such examples highlight a paradox in portrayals of rural communities in Madame de Genlis's texts, since they are concurrently spaces of collective social experience and of social difference. Members of the community are separated by the socio-cultural knowledge they possess. Members of the nobility, returned *émigrés* especially, must learn to engage and repersonalise their relationship with the land, while *paysans* must grasp the recalibrated 'superstructural' aspects of social life, organic economies of value which emphasise an appreciation of the intrinsic, divine worth of human and non-human nature. Madame de Genlis thus includes a balanced yet comprehensive spectrum of knowledge, as further demonstrated in the entry on the 'orme' in the *Botanique*: 'on prétend que les fleurs de l'orme sont nuisibles aux abeilles, et que les grains le sont aux oiseaux; mais ces feuilles sont une excellente nourriture, en hiver, pour les moutons, les chèvres et les bœufs'.⁶¹ Knowledge of this sort, whether acquired by way of direct, personal experience or passed down from generation to generation, would be commonplace for the rural worker. Neither the symbolic nor the practical is held to be of greater value, but instead, is treated in equal measure across a diverse collection of texts.

Both the *émigré* and the *paysan* must overcome the respective gaps in their knowledge through a commitment to learning about the land and how to work it, a commitment, however, which must be rooted within the specific traditions of the nested

⁶⁰ *Botanique*, I. 50-51.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I. 40.

communities in rural France, if it is to be productive.⁶² Recognition of the importance of perfecting nature involves accepting one's individual role within the community, whether it be that of the rural farm worker or the literary-minded *seigneur*. All citizens, because they are of different backgrounds and suited to a variety of occupations within communities, must work, as creative and uniquely capable individuals, towards the re-establishment of the 'jardins délicieux d'Eden', which is an integral aspect of the rural model. Accordingly, the human being, unlike the bee, possesses an exclusive productive capability within the nested ecology of the local community.

Social responsibility thus pertains to the 'homme actif et laborieux' as an enlightened, ecologically sensitive being who understands himself and others: human and non-human. In the *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple*, Madame de Genlis stresses the need for man's 'connaissance de la dignité, de son être et de ses devoirs'.⁶³ For her, it is true awareness of man's being and duties which will, ultimately, 'le rendre ami de l'ordre, de la paix, et de l'équité'.⁶⁴ From this perspective, some measures of social control are necessary, and individual duties within the community should be recognised, if a harmonious socio-political environment, within which citizens can exist as creative individuals – without resorting to destructive behaviour, like the Chevalier – is to come into being. This aspect of Madame de Genlis's thought is echoed in current conceptions of decentralised communities. Edward Goldsmith's *Blueprint for Survival*, a seminal ecocritical text, for example, lists a number of criteria paramount to the foundation of ecologically responsible communities:

The small community not only is the organizational structure in which internal or systemic controls are most likely to operate effectively, but its dynamic is an essential source of stimulation and pleasure for the individual. Indeed it is probable that only in the small community can a man or woman be an individual.⁶⁵

The decentralised community, although subject to 'systemic controls', provides a structural framework which permits individuality while maintaining ecologically sensitive productivity – in both a material and a cultural sense.

Labour, for Bookchin, is 'both the medium whereby humanity forges its own self-

⁶² Tradition, according to Scruton is 'not a custom or ritual but a form of social knowledge', *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 31.

⁶³ *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple*, p. 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Goldsmith, p. 51.

formation and the object of social manipulation'.⁶⁶ Equally, for him, it 'involves not only the projection of human powers into free expression and selfhood but their repression by the performance principle of toil into obedience and self-renunciation'.⁶⁷ In this sense, it can be a creative, technological process which supports and advances human community, or a means of bringing about socio-cultural differences, and thus, division. The ideological parallel between Madame de Genlis and Bookchin begins to diverge at the point of their respective sacralisation and secularisation of the productive nature of human communities which are, ideally, regulated according to very different moral standards, and consequently, shaped by different understandings of hierarchy.

Where Bookchin views hierarchy as a social construct at the root of environmental degradation and crisis, arguing that ecological problems 'originate in a hierarchical, class, and today, competitive capitalist system that nourishes a view of the natural world as a mere agglomeration of "resources" for human production and consumption', Madame de Genlis considers it to be a means of restoring 'natural' balance in an altered France.⁶⁸ As a means of attaining the shared objective of society for the so-called greater good, as with the bees and their honey, hierarchy is justified. This leads characters such as Volnis – who is not himself a labourer – to suggest that an acceptance of the divine in the natural world informs the evolution of an organic hierarchy, which, while dissolving the traditional, pre-Revolutionary feudal dialectic of serf and *seigneur*, perpetuates the exploitation of a labouring class, and indeed, the notion of class distinction itself:

Dans les champs, dans les ateliers de la nature, on voit une classe d'hommes simples et laborieux, se chargeant seuls d'exécuter la sentence portée contre la race humaine; sentence à la fois équitable et paternelle; car elle ne prescrit que des travaux utiles, bienfaisants, et qui, loin d'affaiblir la santé, la rendent plus florissante, et prolongent la vie.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 120. He also comments that 'as long as hierarchy persists, as long as domination organizes humanity around a system of elites, the project of dominating nature will continue to exist and inevitably lead our plant to ecological extinction', in 'Racism and the Future of the Movement', in *Defending the Earth: Debate Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), p. 97. Bookchin argues that 'the breakdown of primordial equality into hierarchical systems of inequality, the disintegration of early kinship groups into social classes, the dissolution of tribal communities into the city, and finally the usurpation of social administration by the State – all profoundly altered not only social life but also the attitude of people toward each other, humanity's vision of itself, and ultimately its attitude toward the natural world', *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 109.

⁶⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. 170.

With these words, Volnis associates the work of cultivating nature, particularly the produce of the ‘ateliers de la nature’ – which in fact constitutes the material sustenance of the community – with the moral task of supporting ‘la race humaine’. This is a position of privilege and of vulnerability: the industrious labourer is outdoors, master of the fields, but nevertheless subservient within a divine hierarchy, forced to serve the sentence brought against humanity by God as a result of original sin in Eden.⁷⁰ Volnis considers this sentence to be just and, furthermore, aligns it with a form of paternal care, which once again, emphasises the fundamental significance of a form of organic hierarchy – mediated through the bonds of nature – as an instructional tool, conducive to the formation of productive, moral communities.⁷¹ This work is deemed beneficial because it sustains community: it facilitates the satisfaction of human needs. Volnis nevertheless acknowledges that ‘le cultivateur travaille sans relâche’, and emphasises the worthy spiritual and material rewards which await those willing to undertake such work:

à l’air libre, à la face du ciel; environné de toutes les richesses qu’il a forcé la terre de produire, il peut contempler comme conquêtes ces heureux fruits de son industrie, et ces nombreux troupeaux, et tous ces animaux soumis à son joug.⁷²

Volnis’s conception of social responsibility is thus tied to work, which is, in turn, an action embedded in community because it rebuilds and renews ecological bonds. Every man can share in the continual shared conquest, reminding him that he is self-sufficient within a societal structure – an ideal which formed the basic premise for freedom in the ancient world.⁷³ Seen in this light, humankind’s freedom stems from and is experienced through the conquering of non-human nature, producing crops throughout the seasons, and the subjugation of animals.⁷⁴ It is, in this regard, inextricably linked with hierarchical structure

⁷⁰ See The Bible, NIV, Genesis 3. 17-19, when God says to Adam: ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life’.

⁷¹ Margaret Anne Doody, in *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) explains that ‘Roman law gave little emphasis to the individual, except when that individual was paterfamilias’, the Greek law, meanwhile ‘emphasised the household, *oikos*, and the links of kinship both natural and artificial (as phratry and deme)’ (p. 68). She observes that Roman law does not ‘conceive society in this spreading network, instead, it ‘ shows a clear orientation towards *patria potestas* [paternal power]’ and a structure of society in which wide discretionary powers are put in the hands of individuals’ (ibid). In Madame de Genlis’s texts, it is possible to discern an attempt to collate the most effective aspects of these ancient modes of thinking, in order that the recalibrated rural model should be given a solid, ethical foundation.

⁷² *Maison rustique*, I. 170.

⁷³ See Bookchin’s observations on the meaning of the Greek, *autarkeia*, in relation to self-sufficiency in *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 186.

⁷⁴ This foreshadows Engels’s notion of class-based social divide encroaching on the liberty of the individual – cited in Howard L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology*: ‘The slavery in which the bourgeoisie has bound the

and the notion of humankind's responsibility towards God, oneself, one another, and non-human nature, that is, towards the ecological community as a whole. Such a model, however, can also maintain divisions and coercive hierarchies, potentially justifying these social constructs in terms of the natural.

NECESSITY AND FREEDOM IN RURAL HIERARCHIES

Madame de Genlis had already expressed, in the *Catéchisme de morale*, her belief that 'la liberté ne consiste cependant pas à faire ce qu'on veut, car nul homme ne serait véritablement libre, puisque tous sont faibles, dépendant des choses, de la dure nécessité', again underlining the interdependence of members of the ecological community.⁷⁵ Without freedom, '[l'homme] ne serait ni coupable, ni condamnable', thus he could not be held accountable for the consequences of his actions.⁷⁶ In addition to this, her portrayal of man in the *Dictionnaire critique* reiterates that, 'l'homme, par sa nature, est fait pour être dépendant, puisque la justice divine et l'intérêt de la société le condamnent au travail, et que d'ailleurs il a sans cesse besoin des autres'.⁷⁷ As part of the natural world itself, human beings cannot be liberated from nature since they are themselves nature and require the assistance of other human beings, that is, they are subject to what Kate Soper describes as a 'politics of need'.⁷⁸

Hegelian thought similarly places emphasis on this dialectic: considering freedom as the recognition of necessity, which suggests that being free is associated with human needs and illustrates human interdependency. Madame de Genlis too, composes a similar image of humankind's need to work the land – and with members of Leopold's 'land community', in a state of interdependence, a term which is, according to Dobson, 'centrally important in the

proletariat, comes nowhere more plainly into daylight than in the factory system. In it all freedom comes to an end in both law and fact. The workman must be in the factory at half past five. If he comes a few minutes late, he is punished; if he comes ten minutes late, he is not allowed to enter until after breakfast, and thus loses a quarter of a day's wage. He must eat, drink and sleep at word of command... The despotic bell calls him from his bed, calls him from breakfast and dinner. And how does he fare in the mill? The master is the absolute law-giver. He makes what regulations he pleases; he alters and makes additions to the code at pleasure; and if he insert the veriest nonsense, the courts say to the workman: since you have entered into this contract voluntarily, you must now carry it out' (p. 190).

⁷⁵ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 13. Even members of the royal family are deemed to be enslaved, owing to their social condition. In the entry on royauté in her *Dictionnaire critique*, she states that 'la royauté n'est qu'un orageux esclavage, et dans tous les temps les rois ne sont que des illustres victimes pompeusement parées pour des sacrifices de tout genre', *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 223 – 224.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II. 13.

⁷⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 282.

⁷⁸ See Kate Soper, *On Human Needs: Open and Closed Theories in a Marxist Perspective* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 4. See also Hartley Dean, *Understanding Human Need: Social Issues, Policy and Practice* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010): 'if human society were organised with a view to satisfying universal need, we would have no need of rights, at least not of citizenship-based rights associated with capitalist liberal democracies' (p. 165).

Green lexicon’.⁷⁹ From this understanding, members of the rural community experience freedom positively, in that they have the freedom to repersonalise their relationship with the natural world, that is, the freedom to act within an ordered environment, rather than needing to be liberated from the eternal cycle of nature. Madame de Genlis’s conception of freedom corresponds to that of Scruton, who states that freedom ‘without institutions is blind’ and that it is ‘comprehensible as a social goal only when subordinate to something else, to an organization or arrangement which defines the individual aim’.⁸⁰ Much like Scruton, whose writing on this subject stemmed from his own self-proclaimed ‘[rebellion] against the prevailing ethos of rebellion’ which he encountered during the student protests in France in 1968, Madame de Genlis’s response to social upheaval can be seen as an attempt to re-establish order, balance, and to demarcate social boundaries in the home, within communities and across the nation.⁸¹ This was an objective which the author shared with the new citizen subjects themselves, who, in Alan Sikes’ words,

having rejected the old hierarchies of power once held to enshrine an eternal and immutable order and overturned the *ancien régime*, sought to understand themselves vis-à-vis the liberty [they] had just won – a never-ending project, for once all hierarchies of meaning had been thrown down, even liberty itself proved difficult to define with certainty.⁸²

Further developing a similar line of thinking, in a discussion of the merits of conservatism and conservation as a means of safeguarding established social structure in the modern age, Scruton claims that without mechanisms of social order, freedom ‘amounts to no more than a gesture in a moral vacuum’.⁸³ Order, for Madame de Genlis, represents an entirely organic and, perhaps most importantly, moral means of affording certain individual freedoms while ensuring the development of productive, sustainable communities. She is especially clear that community itself should be valued above the interests of the individual, writing in the *Catéchisme de morale*: ‘on ne peut pas douter que le bien de la société ne soit quelque chose de bien plus considérable que le bien de quelques hommes en particulier’.⁸⁴ Interest in the ‘bien de société’, as opposed to the ‘bien de quelques hommes en particulier’, is indicative of

⁷⁹ Dobson, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁸² Alan Sikes, *Representation and Identity from Versailles to the Present: The Performing Subject* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 90.

⁸³ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Catéchisme de morale*, pp. 112-113.

a concern for the continuation of a particular mode of living, maintaining a feeling for the *oikos*, as an ecologically sensitive community, on both a local and national level.

Scruton's recent 'case for an environmental conservatism', *How to Think Seriously about the Planet*, mirrors the unease present in Madame de Genlis's writing about 'the loss of equilibrium that ensues when people cease to understand their surrounding as home', seeing this as being connected to *oikophilia* – 'the love and feeling for home' – through his repeated call for a society which holds the ecological inheritance of its future members above the immediate gratification of human beings as individuals.⁸⁵ Ultimately, he contends that 'the political battles of our time concern, therefore, the conservation and destruction of institutions and forms of life'.⁸⁶ Madame de Genlis's extensive attempts to preserve, reconstruct and maintain the post-Revolutionary nation are intertwined with the emerging narrative of social freedom.

Here too, there is common ground with Bookchin, who considers social ecology to be the concept of 'an ever-developing universe' and a 'vast process of achieving wholeness' by means of 'unity in diversity', with 'creative potentialities that thematically intertwine two legacies or traditions: a legacy of freedom and a legacy of domination'.⁸⁷ He looks back to a time pre-dating that evoked by Diderot in his discussion of agriculture, to the 'cooperative spirit that formed the basis for the survival of the organic community', which was an 'integral part of the outlook of preliterate people toward nature and the interplay between the natural world and the social'.⁸⁸ With regard to the ancients, Diderot underlines the cooperative bond between humans and non-human others – especially with the earth itself:

⁸⁵ Scruton, *How to Think Seriously about the Environment: The Case for an Environmental Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4 and p. 3.

⁸⁶ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 8.

⁸⁷ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 11. He also states that the word 'social' in 'social ecology' serves 'the purpose of bringing the highest precepts of libertarian socialism into this concept of an "ecological society" – that is, a society that embodies the highest goals of thinkers like Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and Kropotkin' (ibid).

⁸⁸ Bookchin, *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, pp. 60-61. Additionally, in the *Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin states that a 'plausible case can be made for viewing the earliest human communities as egalitarian, in which differentiations along age, gender, and kinship lines were functionally complementary to each, not based on command and obedience'. He further suggests that 'organic society is notable for its non-hierarchical outlook towards experience, a sensibility that accepts differences in people such as those of age and gender on their own terms, without ranking them in hierarchical status groups. Organic societies usually cast their institutional arrangements along complementary lines, in which differences among individuals form a *pattern* of relationship rather than a system of dominance and submission. Such communities are mutualistic or complementary in that they take responsibility for the well-being of all their members, irrespective of their capabilities' (p. 26). See also, Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (Harper Collins UK, 1983), p. 53: 'Before 1500 the dominant world view in Europe, as well as in most other civilizations, was organic. People lived in small, cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships, characterized by the interdependence of spiritual and material phenomena and the subordination of individual needs to those of the community'.

Elle [la terre] nous donnait autrefois, dit Plin, ses fruits avec abondance; elle prenait, pour ainsi dire, plaisir d'être cultivée par des charrues couronnées par des mains triomphantes: et pour correspondre à cet honneur, elle multipliait de tout son pouvoir ses productions. Il n'en est plus de même aujourd'hui; nous l'avons abandonnée à des fermiers mercenaires; nous la faisons cultiver par des esclaves ou par des forçats; et l'on serait tenté de croire qu'elle a ressenti cet affront.⁸⁹

When humankind worked with a spirit of cooperation the yield was plentiful. Human beings enjoyed a relationship with the earth based on a kind of equality and mutual respect, with the anthropomorphised 'terre' taking pleasure from being cultivated by 'mains triomphantes'. By abandoning the land to be cultivated by those who are alienated from the *oikos*, that is, those who lack feeling for the *oikos* as a space of both community and home, such as the exploitative farmers, or those who are not free – the slaves and convicts – the cooperative bond between humankind and nature is broken.

Nature's economy is shown to be one based on intrinsic, spiritual or aesthetic value. The freedom to care for the land, recalling both Leopold's 'land ethic' and Walter and Dorothy Schwarz's notion of the spiritual, is integral to the formation of an ecologically aware community, the loss of which Diderot chronicles through an agricultural lens in the *Encyclopédie* and which Volnis aspires to reinstate. Indeed, Volnis's sensitivity to what is presented here as nested ecology, whereby human beings work within and across ecological hierarchies through the process of cultivating the land and re-imbuing it with spiritual value, is illustrated by his acknowledgement of the interdependence between humankind and the non-human other. As he states:

L'homme est obligé d'arracher à la terre le grain précieux qui le nourrit, mais la rose des bois croît pour lui sans culture; s'il ne peut assurer son existence que par le travail, du moins la nature fait tous les frais de ses plaisirs; elle les lui présente avec profusion, et ces plaisirs si purs ne lui coûtent point de recherches pénibles, et ne lui laissent ni repentir, ni regrets.⁹⁰

Although he must work for the grain which nourishes him, Volnis sees man as being compensated for his efforts by the profusion of pleasures, such as those embodied by flowers, like the wild 'rose des bois', produced by the earth.

This cooperative relationship, far from causing regret, as decaying, material pleasures

⁸⁹ *Encyclopédie*, Diderot, I. 184. In this same entry, he also notes that 'les travaux de la campagne abandonnés à des hommes subalternes, ne conservent leur ancienne dignité que dans les chants des poètes'.

⁹⁰ *Maison rustique*, I. 167

might, respiritualises his relationship with the natural world. As an *émigré*, not only had he been physically displaced from his homeland, but in addition, his noble social status had alienated him from the *oikos*. Through his repersonalised relationship with the natural world, and the practice of working the land, Volnis comes to see home – dwelling and *oikos* – as a site which transcends material value. His message throughout the *Maison rustique* is clear: ‘nous ne nous éloignerons plus de nos foyers; vivre en paix dans sa patrie, au sein de sa famille, c’est goûter tout le bonheur qu’on peut goûter sur la terre’.⁹¹ Madame de Genlis’s interest in ‘la petite société villageoise’, throughout her texts, is not purely an idealisation of simple, rural living, which she hopes will form the foundation for an ethically sound nation, but rather, an attempt to come to terms with dynamic social change.⁹² The *oikos* is the site of community, on both a local and national scale.⁹³

ECONOMY AND *OIKOS*

Analysis of labour as a socially responsible practice – and indeed, one which is ecologically sensitive – in Madame de Genlis’s texts, sheds light on the apparently contradictory ideal of labourers’ freedom evolving in the post-Revolutionary nation. While examining both the American and French Revolution, for example, Arendt highlights the tension in the relationship between necessity and freedom, indicating that: ‘[the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution] had liberated [labourers] from their masters only to put them under a stronger taskmaster, their daily needs and wants, the force, in other words, with which necessity compels men’.⁹⁴ Although the conception of freedom as necessity establishes a beneficial interdependence between human and non-human entities in Madame de Genlis’s work, from an ecocritical perspective, further complications arise. When the fulfilment of life processes, that is, the burden of necessity, becomes society’s overarching goal – at ‘the very centre of human endeavour’ – ecological balance is lost.⁹⁵ Arendt, while not typically

⁹¹ Ibid., III. 2.

⁹² *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 19.

⁹³ This idea can be aligned with a form of social and political decentralisation known as ‘bioregionalism’, which supports local communities, without eradicating the notion of a national community. Perhaps also akin to Billig’s argument that nation-states do not exist in isolation, but rather, in a complex of other nation-states (see p. 20).

⁹⁴ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 53.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

recognised as an ecocritical scholar, nevertheless underlines a compelling ecocritical argument by illustrating how ecological equilibrium was lost when the objective of the French Revolution was no longer ‘to liberate men from the oppression of their fellow men, let alone to found freedom, but to liberate the life process of society from the fetters of scarcity so that it could swell into a stream of abundance’.⁹⁶ For her, as well as in ecocritical study, abundance for the sake of abundance, where it becomes a mark of individual social distinction, is harmful to the community; furthermore, from an ecocritical perspective, if conceived of in terms of the nested model with its organically formed, integrated mechanisms of social order or hierarchies, it is the antithesis of freedom.

Parsons, in *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, further confirms the presence of anxiety about humankind’s liberation in post-Revolutionary France – a new social fluidity couched in questions of poverty, the mechanization of production, ownership of property and the redistribution of land – with his comment that ‘ecological considerations go to the winds when human economy is one of scarcity and a war of each against all, as it was for the vast masses of the poor in nineteenth-century industrialized societies’.⁹⁷ The theme of social responsibility unfolds as an even greater subject-matter in the re-conceptualisation of environment – which is under immense stress and treated as a passive habitat intended to supply the needs of human beings – and its relationship to the notion of citizenship, and to the nation. For Parsons, in particular, ‘neither persons nor nonhuman creatures are safe’ in a society and ecology of scarcity: ‘all are endangered by genocide and ecocide’.⁹⁸ These are concerns which resurge in the work of contemporary ecocritical scholars. As Wimberley indicates, ‘meeting basic daily needs such as nutrition, housing, and safety require [sic] every human being to act economically’.⁹⁹ This raises a problem, however, since according to Wimberley there are ‘inherent contradictions to be found in functioning as an “economic” versus an “ecological” person’.¹⁰⁰ These same tensions arise in Madame de Genlis’s texts, with the ideal of ecological balance as the fulcrum around which the rural model is constructed.

In *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, Jeanne Blondel is a member of the rural community whose conduct aims at ecological sensitivity while also being an economically productive labourer. As a mother at the head of a successful manufacturing process, she defies

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Howard L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, p. 47.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹⁹ Wimberley, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

stereotypical conventions – an example of social fluidity at work within the regulated societal structure of a prosperous, rural community:

Elle se mit à la tête de la manufacture [de filature], qui prospéra; elle établit de plus, dans sa maison, une superbe vacherie; elle fit du beurre frais pour les campagnes voisines; du beurre salé et des fromages pour les autres provinces. Toutes ces choses eurent une grande vogue. Elle cultiva avec le même bonheur ses champs, ses vergers, ses potagers et sa vigne.¹⁰¹

Her business flourishes because, more than simply providing her with a self-sufficient livelihood established ‘dans sa maison’, it supplies necessary resources to ‘les campagnes voisines’ and ‘les autres provinces’. Here, abundance serves a greater utilitarian purpose, rather than being an ultimate aim in itself. It is indicative of a certain ecological sensitivity that aims to satisfy the needs of those living beyond the immediate local area: also serving communities nested within neighbouring regions. Jeanne’s produce is abundant in an additional sense – through cooperation – as the cultivation of an earth which requires proper care and management, according to Madame de Genlis’s rural model. This highlights the beneficial role that cooperation with the non-human plays in society.

Moreover, as an honourable practice, her agricultural business offers a kind of social stability in keeping with an overarching prioritisation of the bonds of nature: preserving a familial connection to the land. Jeanne encourages her son, Thomas Blondel, for example, to remain a ‘jardinier’, by emphasising several advantages of the role, which are magnified by its perceived communitarian and socially responsible facets, which allow him to support members of the community by providing them with an honourable living:

Songe, mon enfant, [lui dit-elle], que tu n’aurais jamais, dans un autre état, les connaissances et l’habileté que tu dois à la longue expérience; ne rougis jamais du titre de jardinier et d’agriculteur; sois toujours sobre et religieux, par conséquent honnête homme; doux et humain pour les ouvriers que tu emploies et pour tes domestiques; paie-les bien; ne fais point de dettes ni d’entreprises téméraires; contente-toi de la fortune que nous avons acquise: une folle ambition en a perdu plusieurs; enfin sois compatissant pour les pauvres; maintiens l’ordre, l’économie et la simplicité dans ton ménage, et tu seras toujours honoré et toujours heureux.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 105.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The occupation of ‘jardinier’ is attributed an air of nobility owing to the skill and experience that it requires – knowledge handed down from generation to generation – in order to cultivate the land fruitfully. Although Thomas is a self-sufficient master, who lives according to the Greek ideal of *autarkeia*, he nevertheless remains subservient to life’s processes, the climate and seasons.¹⁰³ In this sense, Thomas exists within a divine hierarchy – Madame de Genlis’s ecological guarantee that hierarchies existing in accordance with the nested model, once again, impose a condition of measured restraint on a true leader, who is ‘sobre et religieux’, an ‘honnête homme’ who is gentle and humane – spiritually distinguished from non-human creatures – in his dealings with workers in his employ. The implementation of hierarchy is once again painted as a beneficial, and even a profitable, mechanism of social order in a dual sense – in terms of the productivity of both human and non-human resources. The ‘ouvriers’ outdoors and the ‘domestiques’ of the interior are, theoretically, provided with well-paid employment, while engaged in the process of cultivating the earth as *natura naturans*. Moreover, while it is the duty of the employer to pay them fairly, he must remain faithful to a moral code, avoiding personal ‘dettes’ and ‘entreprises téméraires’, owing to the fact that he is responsible for paying the workers’ wages – that is, they are dependent upon him, while he is dependent upon God and His divine creation(s).

Thomas is also warned against greed and ‘folle ambition’ by his mother, since increasing one’s fortune brings with it the risk of disrupting a chain of order, economy, and simplicity in the home as well as threatening the familial bond founded upon the wealth of an agricultural inheritance: ‘contente-toi de la fortune que nous avons acquise’. The maintenance of ecological balance – an interdependence between humankind and non-human nature – is thus rooted in an economic reality, though it is also constructed according to Bookchin’s understanding of the ‘super-structural’ attributes of social and cultural life couched in a learned ‘land-ethic’. Socio-cultural and economic division, as a result, is not yet fully eradicated, or else Jeanne would have no need to advise her son to be ‘compatissant pour les pauvres’. Rather than being indicative of a kind of conservatism which perpetuates disunion between members of the ecological community, however, this is evidence of a social edifice shown to be in mid-renovation, connotative of a kind of political conservatism that Scruton, for example, defines as ‘the maintenance of social ecology’, and sees as an ‘attempt to

¹⁰³ See Bookchin, who writes, ‘Even though the usurer, trader and artisan began to pre-empt the farmer in social power, the tension between reality and ideal, while it finally destroyed the traditional reality, did not destroy the traditional ideal. In fact, agriculture enjoyed cultural eminence in the classical world not only because it conferred self-sufficiency on its practioners but also because it was seen as an ethical activity, hence not only a *techne*’, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 386.

perpetuate a social organism through times of unprecedented change'.¹⁰⁴ According to Madame de Genlis's rural model, the establishment of harmonious post-Revolutionary communities relies not only on a re-conceptualisation of social hierarchies, but also on reconfigured conceptions of value.

A working understanding of the land is portrayed as the basis of true wealth, with characters such as Volnis, for example, claiming that they will renounce the ostentation and lavish spending of their former, pre-Revolutionary mode of living, in favour of 'les richesses véritables; celles que nous offre l'ingénieuse agriculture'.¹⁰⁵ These words echo those of Diderot, who describes 'les fruits de la terre' as 'la première richesse'.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, both Volnis's and the Blondels' ecological outlook prefigure that outlined in Goldsmith's *Blueprint for Survival*, in which he suggests that 'small farms' run by 'teams with specialized knowledge of ecology, entomology, botany, etc. will then be the rule, and indeed individual small-holdings could become extremely productive suppliers of eggs, fruit and vegetables to neighbourhoods'.¹⁰⁷ Small, self-regulating communities are a necessary step in the process of (re)constructing the nation and redistributing its wealth. As a result, the inequalities depicted in Madame de Genlis's writing are, to a great extent, a by-product of her rhetorical negotiation between different ways of approaching the conservation of tradition and progress. She offers descriptions of holy or monastic communities as the embodiment of self-sustainable decentralisation which perpetuates a united sense of morality across the nation.

In the *Dictionnaire critique* 'les ecclésiastiques' are referred to as proprietors of an extensive amount of land, which Madame de Genlis views as justifiable owing to their careful cultivation of this land and the benefits their agricultural work provides for the community:

Les ecclésiastiques ont eu des grands biens, mais rien n'a jamais été plus pur et plus respectable que l'origine de ces fortunes, dont, au reste, on a fort exagéré l'étendue; ils devaient leurs richesses aux dons particuliers de la piété et à leur travail, à des défrichements de terrains incultes et abandonnés.¹⁰⁸

The author's cautious tone suggests that the idea of possessing 'des grand biens', and, in addition, the 'origine' of one's fortunes, are topics to be treated with sensitivity in the

¹⁰⁴ Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About The Planet*, p. 9, p. vii.

¹⁰⁵ *Maison rustique*, I. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Diderot, I. 184.

¹⁰⁷ Goldsmith, *A Blueprint for Survival*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 78.

political climate of early nineteenth century France. Her need to affirm that the wealth of the Church, and the means by which they have procured it has been exaggerated, at first glance, sits uneasily with her rationalisation of the source of ‘richesses’ – being ‘des défrichements de terrains incultes et abandonnés’. It points toward societal anxiety about monopolies of freedom and ownership, tradition and progression.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, it is characteristic of her attempts to contradict certain strands of thinking in enlightenment circles, fulfilling Montoya’s epithet of ‘critic from within’.¹¹⁰ This is evident in ‘Le Philosophe pris au mot, ou le mari corrupteur’, a tale from the *Nouveaux contes moraux* in which Madame de Genlis critiques a number of Republican principles brought to light in the writings of *les philosophes*, viewing them as antisocial and harmful to the nation:

Les idées républicaines étaient devenues presque générales; cependant une ombre de royauté subsistait encore. Belmont faisait avec acharnement les motions les plus incendiaires; il proposait la loi agraire, il disait que *le premier qui osa clore et cultiver un terrain, fut l’ennemi du genre humain, qu’il fallait l’exterminer; que les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n’est à personne*.¹¹¹

Madame de Genlis is unprepared for the radicalism of true equality, showing contempt for Rousseau’s words, which she has incorporated into her own text, in italics. The notion that boundaries and cultivation are antithetical to humankind’s progress contradicts the very purpose of the author’s societal project. If ‘*les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n’est à personne*’, as Rousseau would have it, then the paradigm of nested ecology disintegrates. The need for socially responsible behaviour is eliminated and there can be no economy, in the sense that there is no ecological interdependence, and thus no means of production. By contrast, Madame de Genlis describes the aforementioned ‘ecclésiastiques’ as a ‘classe’ – thereby emphasising their differentiation from others as a form of nested, hierarchical community, as opposed to beings united only through their alienation from the earth, since

¹⁰⁹ This is especially pertinent, given McPhee’s comments on criticism of the equivocal position of Church in the rural communities of early nineteenth-century France: ‘As members of a corporate, privileged body, parish priests envisaged a rejuvenated feudal order under the auspices of a Catholic monopoly of worship and morality. As commoners by birth, however, they were also ominously sympathetic to the needs of the poor, the opening of positions – including the Church hierarchy – to ‘men of talent’, and to calls for universal taxation’ (pp. 19–20).

¹¹⁰ See the introduction to this thesis, Montoya (p. 3). Notably, in the *Dictionnaire critiqué*, Madame de Genlis claims that the ‘*Encyclopédie* est détestable à tous égards, indépendamment même de tout sentiment religieux’ (I. 174). Despite this, she continues to cite passages of this work in her own texts, particularly in the *Maison rustique*, and, as we have seen, some of her notions relating to agriculture are similar to those of Diderot.

¹¹¹ *Nouveaux contes moraux*, ‘Le Philosophe pris au mot, ou le mari corrupteur’, V. 218. Madame de Genlis has quoted the section in italics from Rousseau.

‘la terre n’est à personne’ – and stresses that their cultivation of the earth is brought about precisely because of their wealth and through their ownership of the land:

Dans aucune autre classe, on n’a fait de la fortune un usage plus humain et plus utile. Lorsque jadis on voyageait en France, on reconnaissait à l’instant, par la beauté de la culture, la propreté des chaumières, que l’on était sur les terres d’une abbaye.¹¹²

This human utility is further tied to an aesthetic quality of ‘beauté’ and ‘propreté’ in the model rural community. Economy, just as with the implementation of a hierarchical social structure, brings order and stability to ecological communities by solidifying the concept of ‘une société de nécessité’, of which Madame de Genlis makes mention in the *Catéchisme de morale*. Even the notion of abundance, construed as luxury – typically a mark of considerable social difference – is justified once the primary material needs of human beings have been met and if its source is natural. Volnis, for example, suggests that:

Le fermier doit avoir un potager pour les besoins de sa famille, et un petit jardin de fleurs pour son agrément; luxe permis, puisqu’il est offert par la nature; c’est surtout pour l’homme des champs que Dieu créa ces productions charmantes, qui en embellissant son séjour, embaument l’air, et le rendent plus sain.¹¹³

The flowers, a commodity ‘offert par la nature’, are considered in aesthetic terms, as a decorative form of luxury which serves to enhance man’s ‘séjour’, during his period of exile on earth and his work in the ‘ateliers de la nature’.¹¹⁴ She believes that humankind will always desire ‘le luxe’, which she regards as ‘nécessaire à la dignité des sociétés humaines’ since it is ‘la démonstration de leur intelligence et de leur noblesse’.¹¹⁵

In her writing, then, a tension similar to that which Gwynne Lewis observes in the conduct of ‘a string of reforming ministers, from the duc de Choiseul in the 1760s to Charles-Alexandre Calonne in the late 1780s’, is manifested. According to Lewis, these reforming ministers would ‘attempt to marry liberal capitalist values to absolute monarchy, only to find that they were strange bedfellows’.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Jürgen Habermas, in his discussion of the development of a bourgeois public sphere in Europe, emphasises the often contradictory aspect of economic practice as it evolved throughout the early modern period when:

¹¹² Ibid., p. 79.

¹¹³ *Maison rustique*, I. 166-167.

¹¹⁴ See *L’Étude du cœur humain*: ‘si la vie n’est qu’une épreuve, et la terre qu’un exil’, p. 48.

¹¹⁵ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 336-337.

¹¹⁶ Gwynne Lewis, *France 1715-1804 Power and the People*, p. 3.

Early capitalism was conservative not only as regards the economic mentality so vividly described by Sombart (a characteristic way of doing business typified by ‘honourable’ gain) but also as regards politics. As long as it lived from the fruits of the old modes of production (the feudal organization of agricultural production involving an enserfed peasantry and the petty commodity production of the cooperatively organized urban craftsmen) without transforming it, it retained ambivalent characteristics.¹¹⁷

These ‘ambivalent characteristics’ are perhaps best articulated in Madame de Genlis’s writing as trepidation in the face of redistributed wealth and its consequences for systems of support within the community. With regard to the *Maison rustique*, for example, an ecocritical reading of text reveals that a nested model of economy emerges alongside the nested ecology – as a means of implementing a supportive infrastructure for all members of the community. She states, for instance, that ‘il y a toujours, chez un grand peuple, beaucoup de gros propriétaires possédant, en différentes contrées, des domaines considérables, dans chacun desquels il y a souvent plusieurs fermes’, adding:

Cela doit nécessairement arriver, et il est même bon que cela soit, non-seulement parce qu’il est naturel que de grands services rendus à l’état, ou des talents distingués, ou des travaux importants, soient récompensés par la gratitude publique, et payés par la fortune; mais aussi parce que, sans le superflu des hommes riches, il ne pourrait rien s’exécuter de ce qu’exigent l’agriculture, le commerce, les arts, en défrichements, dessèchements, améliorations du sol, constructions d’édifices, ponts, digues, chaussées, usines de toutes espèces, grandes plantations, etc., la classe nombreuse de ceux qui vivent du travail de leurs mains, ou qui sont hors d’état de travailler, ne trouverait ni salaire ni assistance, quand cependant sans eux rien ne pourrait aussi se faire de ce qu’on vient de dire [...].¹¹⁸

As with the religious community and their property, Madame de Genlis posits that wealth, entrenched in a kind of meritocracy oriented towards the common good, is central to the infrastructure of a nation. Once again, Bookchin’s ‘super-structural’ attributes of social life – here, ‘le commerce’ and ‘les arts’, for example, are considered alongside the management of agricultural land, in addition to the figurative constructions, such as ‘ponts’ and ‘dignes’ which form the social edifice of the nation. Wealth and social responsibility are inseparable from this perspective, with explicit consequences for the state of the land and the people whose livelihoods depend upon it, should the citizen’s sense of moral duty and place within their environment be lost.

¹¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 15.

¹¹⁸ *Maison rustique*, III. 423-424.

A further critique of the consequences of a lack of social responsibility is to be found in an extract from the *Dictionnaire critique* relating to agriculture. Madame de Genlis denounces those who are wealthy and yet who show unwilling to use their wealth and status to assist others:

Depuis la révolution, l'amour universel de l'argent n'a pas réformé les mœurs; mais cet amour, matériellement solide, a mis à certains égards quelque règle dans les conduites. Nos grands propriétaires ont calculé qu'il valait mieux s'occuper du soin de faire valoir ses terres, pour en mettre le revenu dans ses coffres, que d'y recevoir avec agrément et magnificence sa famille, ses amis et les étrangers. D'ailleurs, comme il n'y a plus de vassaux, et que l'homme est libre; comme il n'y a plus de seigneurs, on n'est plus obligé de fonder dans ses terres des écoles pour des petits enfants, et des hospices pour les malades et les vieillards. Les paysans meurent souvent faute de secours, mais libres comme l'air; ils sont rendus à la nature, ils jouissent pleinement de la dignité de leur état: que faut-il de plus pour être heureux? Dégagés de toute obligation envers cette classe rétablie dans tous ses droits d'hommes, les ci-devant seigneurs ne s'occupent plus que de leurs propres intérêts; ils sont devenus très-instruits dans l'art d'élever, non des orphelins, mais des mérinos: on n'a jamais en France tant parlé des troupeaux. Sans la politique, l'agiotage, la hausse et la baisse de la bourse, nos conversations seraient des véritables idylles.¹¹⁹

In this passage, Madame de Genlis criticises those who are loath to contribute to the construction of the post-Revolutionary nation, those disinclined to help their fellow citizens, to found schools and hospitals: those who fail to live in a spirit of cooperation. It is with irony that she exposes the flaws in a society which equates value with wealth, and land with production purely as a means of exploiting the resources of the environment: it is a society which fails to provide an adequate system of support to its members. The notion of freedom, in a revolutionary sense, is shown to be an illusion: the *paysans* who are born free, die and return to nature, are unable to liberate themselves from the burden of necessity without the support of the community. The wealthy view new equality as an opportunity to be individualistic – the ties of duty or obligation to one's fellow citizens are broken – and since their concern is rooted in economy rather than ecology, the nested model cannot ensure balance between human and non-human entities.

¹¹⁹ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 14-15. Similarly, writing of 'fondations', Madame de Genlis applauds the English model: 'L'Angleterre est l'un des pays où l'on s'est le plus occupé des infortunés. Chaque malheur, chaque situation fâcheuse de la vie y trouve un secours dans tous les provinces; des monuments, des ponts, des chemins, des canaux, des plantations; des bancs couverts et des trottoirs sur les routes; des phares, des hospices, des ateliers gratuits, des collèges, des fondations d'aumônes publiques, les prisons, attestent la compassion ou la sollicitude pour le voyageur, le navigateur, le négociant, la veuve, l'orphelin, le vieillard, le prisonnier, l'ouvrier manquant d'ouvrage, l'infirme et le mendiant. On y voit à chaque pas les traces d'une pensée ingénieusement bienfaisante', *ibid.*, I. 228.

Failure to engage in community through participation in what could be defined as Madame de Genlis's economy of nature results in the alienation of the individual from the *oikos*. The prioritisation of the needs of the individual, of the self – 'l'égoïsme' – is the 'destructeur des devoirs de l'homme envers la société'.¹²⁰ This 'égoïsme' alienates the individual from the community, since he or she does not recognise himself as belonging to an ecological 'home', and thus, does not take up a role in the community which allows him to support others, through the principle of 'l'utilité commune'. Madame de Genlis views the self-centered individual as a threat to nationhood, since the *oikos* cannot be respected, nor its laws valued, if no affinity exists between and across species and non-living phenomena. Of this type of individual, she fears that 'pour se dispenser de choisir et prendre un état, il se fait cosmopolite, pour n'être d'aucun pays en particulier, ou bien il prend avec audace le nom de citoyen, sans savoir le sens de ce mot, ni quelles en sont les obligations'.¹²¹ In this example, the citizen who has detached him- or herself from the nation becomes stateless, and in doing so, he or she breaks the bond of social responsibility which binds them to both human and non-human nature. Their labour ceases to contribute to the good of the community, to the rebuilding of home. Diderot, in the *Encyclopédie*, defines 'cosmopolitain/cosmopolite' as 'un homme qui n'a point de demeure fixe, ou bien un homme qui n'est étranger nulle part'.¹²² The cosmopolitan is a being who is simulatenously at home nowhere and everywhere, paralleling Madame de Genlis's citation of Rousseau.¹²³ As an increasingly important question of the age, citizenship and the possession of an *oikos* within a specific nation are of great importance in Hegel's discussion of ethical life: 'the individual becomes a *son of civil society*, which has as many claims upon him as he has rights in relation to it'.¹²⁴ Hegel's emphasis on the inter-dependent relationship between the citizen and the nation is akin to a natural bond formed between a parent and a child, a relationship which also indicates the child's responsibility towards the parent, that is, to the greater good. This is especially true in the rural model, since, according to Madame de Genlis, patriotism is the ultimate form of ecological 'care': 'l'amour de la patrie renferme des devoirs de citoyen, de sujet, et de

¹²⁰ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 113.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Encyclopédie*, IV. 297.

¹²³ In the same entry in the *Encyclopédie*, an allusion is made to Diogenes, who, in response to being asked where he was from is attributed with having said, I am a citizen of the World: 'Comme on demandait à un ancien philosophe d'où il était, il répondit: je suis Cosmopolite, c'est-à-dire citoyen de l'univers'. The notion of cosmopolitanism, however, can also, conversely have positive implications for the nested ecological model: 'Je préfère disait une autre, ma famille à moi, ma patrie à ma famille, et le genre humain à ma patrie', *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Hegel, 'Philosophy of Right: Ethical Right', §238, p. 373 (original emphasis).

souverain', recalling once again Leopold's 'land ethic'.¹²⁵

Goldsmith's vision for humankind's ecological trajectory in the twentieth century and beyond, in the *Blueprint for Survival*, appears to develop an incarnation of the communitarian precepts present in Madame de Genlis's writing, with the intention of actualising them as a means of preserving the ecosphere. He states that it would:

be sensible to promote the social conditions in which public opinion and full public participation in decision-making become as far as possible the means whereby communities are ordered. The larger a community the less likely this can be: in a heterogeneous, centralized society such as ours [...] but in communities small enough for the general will to be worked out and expressed by individuals, 'us and them' situations are less likely to occur – people having learned the limits of a stable society would be free to order their own lives within them as they wished, and would therefore accept the restraints of the stable society as necessary and desirable and not as some arbitrary restriction imposed by a remote and unsympathetic government.¹²⁶

Goldsmith's decentralised communities are in many ways nested communities – autonomously regulated, like the bees, yet sitting within an overarching national societal structure. The so-called restraints of a stable society are thus necessary, and even desirable, in order to maintain ecological balance. The limits of this so-called stable society permit individuals to live their lives as they see fit, an idea which, while not prohibiting the prospect of social fluidity, does not necessarily promote this as a sustainable or ethical aim. As Madame de Genlis observes in the *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes*:

Les principes généraux de morale et de vertu conviennent sans doute à tous les hommes; cependant chaque état doit avoir encore des préceptes particuliers, et chaque personne doit tâcher d'acquérir les qualités qui peuvent la distinguer dans sa condition.¹²⁷

We return to the notion of *natura naturans* since the author emphasises the work of cultivating nature as a means of distinguishing the individual in his or her 'condition', according to the 'préceptes particuliers' governing their distinct ecosystem. All citizens are to be subject to the same 'principes généraux de morale', though differentiated through their 'qualités'. The Republic allows for a certain amount of public participation in decision-making and, when community leaders such as Volnis guide this process it is possible to

¹²⁵ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 116.

¹²⁶ Goldsmith, p. 50.

¹²⁷ *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes*, IV. 1.

found decentralised, rural communities which are both productive and united on a national scale. In these communities, cooperative institutions in all areas of social life are based on shared values and commitment to common life, akin to Garrard's perception of 'the commune', which is a space of 'mutualistic associations for child care and education, for production and distribution, for cultural creation, for play and enjoyment, for reflection and spiritual renewal' – the very subject matter of Madame de Genlis's texts, especially the *Maison rustique*.¹²⁸ Mechanisms of social order are not based on the demands of power but on the self-realisation of persons as free social beings: on a repersonalised relationship with ecosystems and with the ecosphere itself.

SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE AS WEALTH IN THE *OIKOS*

As we have seen, through the examples such as that of the bee in the *Maison rustique*, Madame de Genlis demonstrates that hierarchies develop organically in the ecosphere. She stresses that within non-human communities in particular, leadership by way of a single 'chef' is, similarly, a basic fact of nature: 'Celles [abeilles, jeunes femelles] qui ne sont point choisies pour conduire les colonies, sont chassées ou massacrées si elles s'obstinent à vouloir rester dans la ruche, parce que les abeilles ne veulent qu'un chef pour les gouverner'.¹²⁹ Despite having anthropomorphised the 'ruche' as a 'république' – using vocabulary which evokes the socio-political climate of unrest in France during the Revolution, and having acknowledged 'la reine, ou mère-abeille' as the 'chef', in subsequent discussions of leadership, she is careful not to describe the 'chef' as either emperor or king: her tone is decidedly neutral.¹³⁰ Given her connection to both the royal and the imperial family, with both parties financially supporting her literary endeavours at different points in her life, this is perhaps unsurprising. Nevertheless, such an impartial presentation of the 'chef unique [qui]

¹²⁸ John Clark, cited in Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 33.

¹²⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. 342.

¹³⁰ By 1810, when the *Maison rustique* itself was published, Napoleon was firmly in power and had established the *Code civil des Français*. Nevertheless, in her *Précis de la conduite* she explains 'J'ai aimé la révolution française avant les crimes qui l'ont souillée; mais quand j'en aurais eu les moyens, je n'aurais voulu ni la faire, ni même y contribuer; j'aurais préféré pour ma patrie le gouvernement monarchique, parce qu'on avait juré solennellement de le conserver; parce que, née sous ce gouvernement, un sentiment naturel m'y attachait, et que d'ailleurs son régime me paraissait le plus doux et le plus paisible de tous; mais quand la république a été établie en France, j'ai souhaité qu'elle s'y maintînt, et je le souhaite toujours avec ardeur [...] je regarderais toujours comme un devoir sacré de respecter l'ordre établi' (pp. 240-241).

dirige tous les individus' allows the author to reaffirm the fact that, in her view, citizens are dependent upon the leadership of an individual, who is, in turn, subject to the authority of God, in order to be brought to a state of enlightenment. Furthermore, it leaves room for her assertion that the distinguishing quality of a leader, or indeed of any person regardless of social status, is the level of education they have received.¹³¹ Correspondingly, she believes that despotic rulers seek to maintain ignorance amongst the general population as a form of subjugation:

Les despotes doivent désirer que les nations qu'ils gouvernent soient plongées dans une profonde ignorance: pour empêcher le peuple de connaître ses droits et sa force, il faut l'abrutir, il faut l'entretenir dans une superstition aussi opposée à la piété véritable qu'absurde aux yeux de la raison, il faut l'avilir jusques dans les amusements qu'on lui procure; pour le subjuguer, il faut enfin le dégrader et le corrompre.¹³²

Knowledge of one's self and one's rights is invaluable. Here, Madame de Genlis acknowledges the 'droits' and 'force' of the people, but their freedom to exercise such power is limited by the despot's abuse of their social standing. Despots subjugate, degrade, and corrupt their people: a causal chain that is reflected in the same misuse, that is, lack of understanding of the environment – Scruton's notion of 'the loss of equilibrium that ensues when people cease to understand their surrounding as home'.¹³³ To counterbalance the possibility of such political tyranny in real life, Madame de Genlis sets about educating the nation through the mouths of her leading characters who are placed at the centre of the rural community, like Volnis. The ecological model of leadership succeeds only when its aim is to eradicate atomistic individualism and to engage with society as part of a greater living identity.

The benevolent leader should devote himself to the common good. Indeed, in the *Catéchisme de morale*, Madame de Genlis states that 'la société ne pourrait parvenir au but pour lequel elle se forme, si elle n'avait un chef qui dirigeât la force publique vers le bien

¹³¹ This is perhaps best illustrated through the example of the young Caroline in *Les Veillées du château*, in conversation with her mother. She is surprised to have been scolded for chattering with the chambermaids at the *château*: 'maman, vous m'avez souvent dit que tous les hommes sont frères, et ...', and is interrupted by her mother, who explains: 'sans doute; nous devons les aimer tous, les secourir, les servir autant que possible. Une grande naissance n'est qu'un avantage d'opinion; mais l'éducation établit entre les hommes une véritable inégalité; une personne raisonnable, instruite, éclairée n'admettra point dans sa société intime, une personne ignorante, grossière, imprudente, et remplie des préjugés' (I. 9-10).

¹³² *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple*, p. 1.

¹³³ Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About the Planet*, p. 3.

commun'.¹³⁴ This idea is reminiscent of the Aristotelian 'philosopher king' – an enlightened individual who disseminates knowledge for the benefit of the community, and who enjoys a form of political rule that is 'natural'.¹³⁵ Furthermore, it becomes clear in the *Dictionnaire critique* that Madame de Genlis's conception of leadership is not limited to a political interpretation, but that it is also transmitted through the superstructural attributes of social life. She lists, for instance, the writer, the poet, and the artist, alongside the warrior and the king as societal leaders whose work affects the fortune of the people:

le libérateur de sa patrie, le roi sage, humain, clément et pacifique, qui fait le bonheur des ses peuples; le législateur qui laisse de bonnes lois; le savant et l'écrivain qui, par leurs travaux et leurs veilles, illustrent leur patrie; le poète et les artistes, dont le génie et les talents enchanteurs font le charme de la société, embellissent la vertu, polissent les mœurs, attirent les étrangers, et répandent sur leur pays un éclat si doux et si brillant: voilà les êtres favorisés des cieux qui méritent la gloire, et qui doivent en obtenir une légitime et durable.¹³⁶

These contributions to socio-cultural life foster a sense of moral community which is ultimately linked with the development of a national consciousness. In this way, Madame de Genlis's texts themselves are literary building blocks central to the (re)construction of the French nation. More than simply practical, as perhaps best embodied by the method of building a rural home described in the *Maison rustique*, such texts also communicate a wide range of socio-cultural information intended to shape the reader's understanding of the rural community and their place within it. By creating generically diverse texts for readers of all backgrounds, the author can be said to be participating not only in the socio-cultural practice of writing, but also, in an ecological act predicated on an acute sense of social responsibility: constructing community and conserving socio-cultural codes through text.¹³⁷

Referring to works such as her own *Discours sur l'éducation publique du peuple*

¹³⁴ *Catéchisme de morale*, p. 116.

¹³⁵ See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy VI: Aristotle, An Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Having devoted an extensive number of years to the education of Louis-Philippe – her own philosopher king – perhaps somewhat surprising, is her comment that '[Louis-Philippe] est trop faible pour se maintenir sur le trône. Je lui ai écrit il y a bien des années [la lettre de Silk] et mon opinion sur lui est la même qu'alors. Il a toutes les vertus d'un bon père de famille, mais aucune des qualités nécessaires à un chef de parti. Point d'ambition et nulle fermeté dans le caractère', *Dernières lettres d'amour: correspondance inédite de la comtesse de Genlis et du comte Anatole de Montesquiou*, ed. by M. le duc de la Force (Paris: Grasset, 1954), p. 60.

¹³⁶ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 241-242.

¹³⁷ The practical quality of *Les Veillées de la chaumière* is further enhanced, for example, by the inclusion of instructions for first aid: 'Des Premiers secours à administrer dans les maladies ou accidents qui menacent promptement la vie', treating, for example: 'coups à la tête', 'coqueluche des enfants' and 'coups de soleil' (I. 269, I. 272, 277 and 280).

(1790), she reaffirms her belief in the importance of public education not only through the content of the text itself, but also, by declaring that: ‘mon zèle pour mes compatriotes de tous les états, n’est point le fruit des nouvelles opinions; il a toujours été dans mon cœur’.¹³⁸ In addition to this, she states that: ‘[le peuple] aimera la justice et la patrie, en connaissant les droits de l’homme et du citoyen’.¹³⁹ Ultimately, in Madame de Genlis’s writing we witness a desire to strengthen the position of the people through the creation of texts which are inclusive despite having been written in a medium which was not yet accessible to all. Indeed, in *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*, Martyn Lyons claims that by ‘studying peasants’ encounters with print culture, we are examining the meeting of peasant civilizations with an expanding national culture’.¹⁴⁰ During Madame de Genlis’s lifetime, a hegemonic French culture had not yet been fully formed, and although her body of works anticipated Jules Ferry’s legislation to make schooling free and compulsory, as Lyons indicates, ‘the cultural horizons of rural life remained extremely narrow during the second republic’.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, Keely Stauter-Halsted, writing of the Polish context in *The Nation in The Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914*, argues that by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘the most articulate version of peasant national identity came from the elite cadre of well-educated, activist small farmers that had been exposed to upper-class images of the nation through periodical literature, agricultural circles, reading rooms, and penny novels’.¹⁴² The content of Madame de Genlis’s texts not only actively interlocks with themes and information pertinent to such an audience, but additionally, by broadening the scope of this audience, seeks to redress an imbalance of social knowledge. Just as with the prospect of redistributing wealth however, the author attempts to conserve ecological balance.

A *dialogue* entitled ‘le paysan politique’ in *Les Veillées de la chaumière* sheds light on the tensions arising between members of the rural community, owing to new political freedoms, as well as highlighting the role of literature in the construction of community. It reveals the author’s anxieties about who should have knowledge – creating in some measure an economy of information – and how it is used. Jérôme, a *paysan* who earns his livelihood as a grape harvester, is found seated at a table, ‘dans une petite chambre de cabaret’ on a

¹³⁸ *Les Parvenus*, p. vi.

¹³⁹ *Discours sur l’éducation publique du peuple*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Lyons, p. 130.

¹⁴¹ Ted W. Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. xxi.

¹⁴² Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in The Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 188. This text has been republished in 2015.

‘jour ouvrier’, with ‘une pinte de vin’, ‘un gobelet’ and ‘un journal’.¹⁴³ Already, in this setting, he is removed from his usual environment – he is shown to be in danger of engaging in licentious behaviour. Enthused by the prospect of shared, liberal access to written knowledge, he observes that, ‘depuis la révolution il faut tout lire; il faut profiter des lumières du siècle: n’avons-nous pas *cheux* nous un Voltaire?’¹⁴⁴ He shows awareness of the ‘lumières du siècle’ as a valuable commodity, reading as a means of acquiring knowledge, a point which is perhaps made all the more powerful when spoken in the dialect of the *paysan*. The reference to ‘un Voltaire’ – an author and *philosophe* elevated to a status of power and national influence – and, in many respects a socio-cultural leader occupying a prominent place in the popular imagination, underlines the power which literary figures enjoyed in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France. Voltaire has become part of a tradition, representing enlightenment – one about which Madame de Genlis is anxious, owing to the proliferation of what she deems to be immoral texts, and its consequences for understanding the *oikos*. Consequently, throughout this text, she casts light on ideological divides which make culture politically relevant and the power of the nobility culturally productive, in opposition to the workers’ potential economic productivity.

Tiburce, the *jeune seigneur*, responds to Jérôme’s musings on Voltaire, and attempts to dissuade him from reading his work, stating: ‘j’ai été indigné de la manière dont il parle des soldats, des artisans, du peuple et des paysans’, further commenting that, ‘il vous appelle *le sot peuple, de la canaille*’.¹⁴⁵ Though young, he speaks with authority and is also able to quote Voltaire himself, in order to sympathise with Jérôme: in doing so, however, he simultaneously perpetuates a mentality of social division because he imposes his own world view upon him. Tiburce intends to persuade Jérôme of Voltaire’s hypocrisy, as a supporter of a so-called liberal, social model doomed to failure because of his lack of feeling for humankind’s ecological condition. According to Jérôme, Voltaire has no regard for *le peuple*.

In fact, in an entry relating to ‘scandale’ in the *Dictionnaire critique*, Madame de Genlis describes the ridiculousness of the ‘pompe funèbre’ accompanying Voltaire’s funerary procession – yet further proving that his status was deeply engrained in the popular mentality – giving a detailed description of the proceedings: people shouting ‘Vive Voltaire!’, unaware of the judgement he had pronounced upon them.¹⁴⁶ Madame de Genlis expresses her affinity

¹⁴³ *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, (original emphasis to indicate that the author is quoting Voltaire).

¹⁴⁶ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 228.

for ‘ce pauvre peuple, abusé en toutes choses’, who regarded Voltaire ‘comme le patriarche des jacobins et des *démocrates*’.¹⁴⁷ She further adds:

Il ignorait que Voltaire, qui en effet avait prêché une révolution, voulait en même temps que [le] peuple qu’il méprisait profondément, le sot peuple (c’est son expression), n’y entrât pour rien, et qu’il n’eût jamais la moindre part au gouvernement, parce que (disait-il) je n’aime pas le gouvernement de la canaille.¹⁴⁸

She is indignant about the implications of a false social fluidity and its consequences for social responsibility, particularly in the political sphere. Her citation, though perhaps out of its original context, is confirmed in a *lettre à Monsieur Tabareau* in the *Œuvres de Voltaire*. The *philosophe* writes: ‘à l’égard du peuple, il sera toujours sot et barbare [...]. Ce sont des bœufs auxquels il faut un joug, un aiguillon et du foin’.¹⁴⁹ Here Voltaire presents human beings as creatures which are inherently barbaric, who require subjugation. His statement simplifies and de-humanises the rural population. They are not set apart from non-human animals as beings existing in a divine hierarchy, nor are they productive as individuals. Conversely, Madame de Genlis’s communitarian approach, although it limits the freedom of individuals, does not discount humankind’s individual creative capacity as *natura naturans*. She formulates an image of human beings which elevates them as cooperative partners with nature and the divine, within the nested ecological community.

Tiburce is able to supply Jérôme with additional information and proceeds to offer him guidance: ‘laisse-là ton Voltaire et la politique, sans quoi tu perdras ton bon sens naturel; tu commenceras par faire des bêtises, tu finiras par faire des crimes; tes enfants deviendront de mauvais garnements, et tes filles déshonoreront ta famille’.¹⁵⁰ Giving an extreme prognosis, he stresses the dangers of reading immoral material, claiming that the ensuing loss of Jérôme’s ‘bon sens naturel’ would eventually bring about his family’s ruin. It is not so much a warning about the dangers of reading but rather, a warning against participation in political activity which threatens the stability of a volatile social edifice. From this perspective, Madame de Genlis’s ideal citizens must avoid separation both physically and ideologically from the natural world by maintaining natural order.

Her model is politically charged, especially in terms of its realised potential, while

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., II. 229 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. II. 229-30.

¹⁴⁹ Voltaire, ‘Lettre à M. Tabareau’ (3 February 1769), *La Statue de Voltaire* (Paris: Douniol, 1867), pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ *Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 114.

promoting a form of de-politicisation for rural inhabitants: a political framework which is almost invisibly constructed through the bonds of nature, that is, one tied to familial connections, and in keeping with the structure of Goldsmith's ideal communities. In response to Tiburce's ominous prediction, Jérôme eventually bows to the continuation of the traditional political order, replying, 'oui, notre jeune seigneur, je vous ai toujours écouté comme mon *pater*'.¹⁵¹ Here, the verb 'écouter' is attributed additional significance because it further extends the image of Jérôme's receptiveness to the continuation of traditional ways – the notion of *veillée* itself, in contrast to the 'journal' read by Jérôme at the beginning of the *dialogue*, as a primary means of disseminating information in rural communities – echoed in the title of *Les Veillées de la chaumière*. The term '*pater*' also serves to indicate that Jérôme is in possession of a form of natural, intellectual and moral superiority, thereby potentially perpetuating outmoded forms of hierarchy which are again, presented as 'natural' through the nested, rural model. This also recalls Volnis's re-establishment of a form of 'natural' patriarchy, through his use of the term 'mes enfants', in addressing the villagers in the *Maison rustique*.¹⁵²

On the subject of readership in rural communities, Martyn Lyons suggests that, in nineteenth-century France, 'landowners and employers frequently discouraged the intellectual ambitions of their tenants and labourers'.¹⁵³ However, books were by no means foreign objects in the household: 'we know that peasant homes might contain an almanac which, like other household objects, would hang from the ceiling by a nail'.¹⁵⁴ The almanac, a descriptor which could be applied, in part, to the *Maison rustique*, was intended for family use. Indeed, Lyons attests that the almanac 'features heavily in descriptions of the peasant household, and the fact that it hung in such a prominent position, and in a place used together by the whole family, suggests that it was in frequent use by the family group'.¹⁵⁵ Of particular relevance to this chapter is his discussion of the *veillée* as 'an event where peasants read stories and popular legends to themselves'.¹⁵⁶ He insists that 'the nineteenth-century clergy were anxious about the *veillée*', liking it to 'the reading of superstitious folk tales and other profanities', and it is clear that Madame de Genlis too sought to transform the tradition into a moral, literary form.¹⁵⁷ In doing so, she could undoubtedly make use of what was seen

¹⁵¹ Ibid. (original emphasis).

¹⁵² *Maison rustique*, II. 4.

¹⁵³ Lyons, p. 133

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 135

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 136

as ‘a traditional form of peasant sociability centred on work, which retained elements of collective celebration, in which oral transmission had little need of books’.¹⁵⁸

Madame de Genlis reintroduces this tradition with particular emphasis on the productive potential associated with the reading of moral tales:

Ce fut un lundi, dans le mois d’août, que pour la première fois on se réunit pour entendre une *belle histoire*: la vieille grand-mère s’établit dans une *chaise à bras* de cuir noir presque aussi antique qu’elle; on posa son rouet devant elle, car les femmes devaient travailler en écoutant les récits.¹⁵⁹

The women work while listening to edifying tales. Both *Les Veillées du château* and *Les Veillées de la chaumière* form part of a *mise en abyme* whereby the texts themselves encourage readers to participate in communal reading, while characters in the *Veillées de la chaumière* engage in their own form of the *veillées*: ‘pendant qu’on lit chez nos maîtres les *veillées du château* je vais donc commencer les *veillées de la chaumière*’.¹⁶⁰ In this way, Madame de Genlis presents an example of literature as a socially responsible practice, which occurs across various nested communities, providing a balanced perspective since she attributes a narrative voice to groups of varied social status. Furthermore, the *épître dédicatoire* of *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, addressed to Léon de Montesquiou, a young acquaintance of the author, confirms that the work is ‘particulièrement consacré à la classe intéressante des villageois’.¹⁶¹ This is notable because it sets the rural-village community apart as a class-unit based on their site of dwelling as opposed to focussing on the social distinction of members within such a community. Madame de Genlis requests that Léon assist the *villageois*, by distributing copies of the text in order to disseminate knowledge: ‘distribuez donc ce livre comme nous en sommes convenus, et en ma faveur, donnez au lieu d’un exemplaire une petite provision de lin aux vieilles femmes qui ne sauront pas lire’.¹⁶² In petitioning for Léon to distribute these books in this way, she stresses the practical value of the text even further, since practical goods are offered in compensation to those who cannot read it for themselves: literature is attributed a productive value.

By contrast, the dangers associated with reading are underlined in ‘Le Philosophe pris au mot, ou Le Mari corrompé’. The moral objective of this tale is to stress the threat to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 17 (original emphasis).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. (original emphasis).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. v.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. v-vi.

national unity which occurs when rational thought, as it was understood by enlightenment thinkers, is taken to extremes. Madame de Genlis considers it her duty as an author to respond to what she deems to be pernicious logic infiltrating the ever-expanding political domain by way of literature. Consequently, she uses the tale to attack those whose writing might be construed as irresponsible and damaging in an unsteady intellectual climate. In particular, she cautions the reader against accepting enlightenment principles – which she considers to be devoid of that spiritual quality which connects the individual to society and to the *oikos*. From this perspective, the libertarian principles of the Revolution are valid only when employed with ecological sensitivity. Figures such as d'Alembert, Diderot, and Marmontel feature as characters in the tale and extracts of their texts are cited as examples of fallacious thinking.

At the beginning of the tale, the protagonist, the Marquis de Clange, surrounded by the *philosophes*, announces his intention to marry. This provokes a reaction of horror around the dinner table, prompting d'Alembert to conclude: 'vous allez sacrifier le seul bien réel: *la liberté*'.¹⁶³ With this statement, the fictionally portrayed d'Alembert thus indicates that the formation of such a bond equates to the loss of individual freedom. The Marquis de Clange's intention to marry, which could indicate an attachment to traditional values, is perceived to be overly conservative by the dinner guests. This young protagonist, impressionable and in awe of his companions, and an admirer of the *Encyclopédie*, is shown to be naïve and is easily influenced. Describing his intellectual disposition Madame de Genlis writes that: 'il se croyait *profond*, parce qu'il approuvait toutes les opinions philosophiques, reçues alors par presque tous les gens du monde'.¹⁶⁴ His approbation of the enlightenment ideology is yet further satirised, with the author informing the reader that, 'il avait adopté, avec transport, toutes les maximes modernes [...] quant aux autres principes philosophiques, relatifs à la politique, à *l'égalité*, aux *droits de l'homme*' without having properly considered their meaning: 'il ne les avait jamais médités'.¹⁶⁵ He is depicted as a character whose ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* are inseparable from his desire to impress others with a display of his goodness. His affected behaviour influences his young bride Julie de Volmas, who, having once had 'le germe précieux de toutes les vertus', is corrupted through blind,

¹⁶³ 'Le Philosophe pris au mot', *Nouveaux contes moraux*. Here the edition used is *Nouvelles de Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Maradan, 1804), p. 200.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202 (original emphasis).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 203 (original emphasis).

uncritical devotion to the precepts of the *philosophes*.¹⁶⁶ The uncritical application of philosophical and religious dogma, is, for Madame de Genlis, unnatural and untenable in the new French nation.

In her ‘corbeille de mariage’, for example, she receives ‘cinq cents louis’, and having been raised as a charitable Christian she plans to use her money to secure the release of prisoners. Her husband, however, instructs her that ‘une *femme galante* est beaucoup plus utile à l’état, en faisant travailler les marchands de modes et les ouvriers, que la *dévote* peut l’être, en soignant des malades, secourant des pauvres et délivrant des prisonniers’.¹⁶⁷ These lines, quoted from the ‘livre *De l’esprit* d’Helvétius’, persuade Julie that a good citizen is concerned with the productivity of the nation, with no regard for the ecological consequences of such an action. She becomes convinced that charity can be of no use to the state, since it prevents the flow of capital into the national economy: ‘la *bienfaisance* n’est qu’une faiblesse, à moins qu’elle ne serve à l’utilité publique’.¹⁶⁸ Having discovered that there is no benefit in carrying out ‘actes isolés de charité’, and additionally: ‘lorsque il s’agit de donner, de secourir, de faire du bien, il faut calculer posément si ces actions pourront servir à l’utilité publique’, Julie hesitates at every turn before offering assistance to her fellow citizens.¹⁶⁹ Julie concludes, upon the advice of the *philosophes*, that there is no purpose in coming to the aid of prisoners, and chooses instead to spend her ‘cinq cent louis’ on ‘chiffons’, in the belief that she is contributing to the economy.¹⁷⁰ What she does not realise, however, is that she has in fact purchased ‘marchandises anglaises’.¹⁷¹ She adds: ‘j’ai dépensé tout cet argent, par un sentiment de bienfaisance, pour faire travailler des ouvriers; puisqu’il vaut mieux *acheter* que *donner*’.¹⁷² Shortly after this incident, when an elderly, impoverished couple beg for her charity, she gives them very little, stating that ‘mes principes ne me permettent pas de donner davantage’.¹⁷³ The reader is informed that, ultimately, ‘Julie rejeta le christianisme, pour suivre la *religion naturelle*’, though it becomes apparent that, for Madame de Genlis, the elimination of the divine from civil life is contrary to the spirit of a truly national community.¹⁷⁴ Referring once more to the *Livre de l’Esprit* d’Helvétius, Madame de Genlis

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 205 (original emphasis). This is certainly a reference to Rousseau’s eponymous heroine, Julie de Wolmar, of his *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 209 (original emphasis to indicate quotation).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Madame de Genlis cites the *Vie de Turgot* by Condorcet (original emphasis to indicate quotation).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 209, p. 210 (original emphasis).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 228 (original emphasis).

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 213 (original emphasis).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

cites an entire passage which promotes precisely the opposite societal conditions to those which she deems integral to the success of the rural model:

Dans les grands principes de l'intérêt de la patrie, il est utile d'éteindre l'amour paternel et filial; que tous ces liens de pères et d'enfants peuvent nuire à ceux de citoyens, et produisent seulement des vices sous l'apparence de vertus; de petites sociétés dont les intérêts, presque toujours opposés à l'intérêt public, éteindraient à la fin, dans les âmes, toute espèce d'amour pour la patrie... et qu'on ne peut soustraire les peuples à ces calamités qu'en brisant entre les hommes tous les liens de la parenté et en déclarant les citoyens enfants de l'état.¹⁷⁵

Nested ecology relies upon a series of natural bonds extending across and within communities, offering a structure of support which is beneficial to all members of the community. Unlike Helvétius, Madame de Genlis encourages the formation of natural bonds as a means of fostering patriotic sympathies and a renewed sense of duty towards the nation. In response to the state of socio-political crisis brought about by the Revolution, Madame de Genlis suggests that the local, rural environment is conducive to the formation of community on a micro and macro scale.

CONCLUSION

Scruton argues that 'there is in every man and woman some impulse to conserve that which is safe and familiar', for conservatism 'arises directly from the sense that one belongs to some continuing, and pre-existing social order'.¹⁷⁶ The *Catéchisme de morale* is an early example, in Madame de Genlis's *œuvre*, of her propensity to engage with this conservative theme in order to highlight humankind's condition, which is distinct from non-human nature as well as being of it. In this sense, human communities are nested within the ecosphere and implicated in the ecological life of its many communities. They differ from beings in non-human communities owing to their cultural and spiritual inclinations. Like non-human others, however, such as the bees, Madame de Genlis regards people as inherently social beings, who, by virtue of their interdependent nature, are duty bound to labour for the 'utilité commune', which is a fundamental, but often overlooked article of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme*.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁷⁶ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p. 10.

This very principle, and the Revolution which inspired it, sets in motion new legacies of freedom while giving rise to new legacies of domination: illuminating the complex notion of social responsibility within rural communities during a period of national reconstruction. According to the rural model, the citizen's responsibility to the community is no longer derived from social status, but rather, from social knowledge. This is a framework in which division is more closely associated with socio-cultural factors rather than purely socio-economic differences. From this perspective, Madame de Genlis preserves a specific conception of socio-cultural hierarchy, one which perpetuates some forms of pre-Revolutionary social structure. However, this hierarchical construct is nevertheless compatible with the liberal, progressive outlook adopted by enlightenment thinkers. With this understanding, both Madame de Genlis's and Scruton's conceptions of social change and conservatism align, for, as the latter states: 'the desire to conserve is compatible with all manner of change, provided only that change is also continuity'.¹⁷⁷ In Madame de Genlis's texts, change – here attributed a liberal connotation – manifests itself as the continuation of productivity. Nature's organic economy is one which emphasises the spiritual or divine in non-human nature, and its connection to morality, as a means of securing socio-political stability within a volatile social edifice.

Madame de Genlis's texts show the emergence of new social demarcations in the early nineteenth century, creating social hierarchies while underlining the cooperative and mutually supporting bonds which unite citizens. Her writing can be interpreted as both a reflection on and as a possible resolution of the tensions which beset the relationship between socio-cultural supremacy and the egalitarian nation in the productive landscape. Humankind exists within a nested ecology, that is, in ecosystems where an interdependence is established between living things which play complementary roles in perpetuating the stability of the natural order. Hierarchy is shown to be an organically evolving mechanism of social order which regulates life processes in the rural community and establishes harmony on a local and national scale. The seeds of an apparently contemporary mode of thinking – ecological sensitivity – are thus sown in Madame de Genlis's texts: a model of social responsibility which aims at cultural hegemony as an expression of national morality, while remaining rooted in the importance of local community.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

CHAPTER THREE
THE PRODUCTIVE PASTORAL:
IMAGINING THE NATION THROUGH CULTURE

In the eighteenth century, the natural world was perceived as ‘a complete, eternal, and morally perfect order’, according to Donald Worster.¹ God was the author of a permanent, perdurable ecosphere with a predestined fate. This was the prevailing conception of the natural world during this period, ‘designed to endure forever as the exact same order of objects interacting with one another in the same old way, surmounting the vicissitudes of time’.² As Jane Bennett similarly asserts, in *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, ‘nature’ was once ‘purposive’.³ This, she explains, meant that ‘God was active in the details of human affairs, human and other creatures were defined by a pre-existing web of relations, social life was characterized by face-to-face relations, and political order took the form of organic community’.⁴ However, with the advent of the Enlightenment, its *philosophes*, and the Revolution, this ‘pre-modern world’, in Bennett’s words, ‘gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic state – all of which, combined, disenchant the world’.⁵

In the *Maison rustique*, Volnis must come to terms with a newly disenchanted world which is inseparable from the memory of ‘[une] terre autrefois si belle et si bien cultivée’.⁶ Faced with the prospect of rebuilding the community, and tormented by the recollection of a rural landscape once comparable with ‘les jardins ravissants d’Eden’, he inhabits an environment which is far from a pastoral idyll: ‘chaque pas lui présente une affligeante réalité, remplaçant une douce illusion pour jamais anéantie’.⁷ It is, arguably, this sentiment – so keenly felt by the author herself upon her return to France after a long period of exile – which influences the development of the pastoral trope in her writing. ‘Je n’essaierai point de peindre les émotions que j’éprouvai en passant la frontière, en entrant en France’, she writes in her *Mémoires inédits*, adding, ‘tout me paraissait nouveau: j’étais comme une étrangère

¹ Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and The Ecological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 10.

² Ibid.

³ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2001), p. 7.

⁴ Ibid., p. 7. Interestingly, Arendt uses the term ‘web of relations’ and ‘world’ synonymously in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶ *Maison rustique*, I. 1.

⁷ Ibid., I. 2.

que la curiosité force à chaque pas de s'arrêter'.⁸ Not only does this lead to her frequent idealisation of the pre-Revolutionary French rural landscape as idyll, but in addition, the need to overcome an acute sense of alienation from *la patrie* – of having become 'une étrangère' in her homeland – translates into depictions of figures who thrive alone in unfamiliar or unmapped territories, which are eventually transformed into pastoral sites of refuge. These solitary figures are often estranged from the nested communities which sit at the heart of healthy ecosystems, and yet, they participate both directly and indirectly in the formation of the 'imagined communities' which correspond to Anderson's concept of nationhood.⁹ Focusing on the figure of the pastoral shepherd in particular, this chapter explores Madame de Genlis's engagement with the pastoral theme, proposing a revised or alternative, and moreover, politically charged interpretation of the pastoral trope, which has consequences for how citizenship, environment, and nation are understood in post-Revolutionary France.

Of the use of the pastoral trope in literature, Garrard writes that 'no other' is 'so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism'.¹⁰ A term deriving from the classical Latin, *pastoralis* – originally relating to the tending of livestock – the pastoral conveys an idealised vision of country life. It presents an aesthetic and often sanitised image of the interrelation between human and non-human nature which shapes socio-cultural convictions about the natural world.¹¹ Jaucourt's entry on the subject in the *Encyclopédie*, for example, emphasises its poetic form – *la poésie pastorale* – as 'une imitation de la vie champêtre représentée avec tous ses charmes possibles'.¹² It is, in this

⁸ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 85.

⁹ Benedict Anderson's conception of the 'imagined community' is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Mitchell, meanwhile, writing of landscapes representation more generally, views it as 'not only a matter of internal politics and national or class ideology but also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism'. From this perspective, landscape is once again artificially constructed: it is a historical 'invention', 'integrally connected with imperialism', which he sees as 'a complex system of cultural, political, and economic expansion and domination that varies with specificity of places, peoples and historical moments', *Landscape and Power*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 37. It is useful to note that the pastoral trope is one of many prevalent in literature-oriented ecocritical studies. Tiitu Speek comments, for example, that 'ecocritics examine significant tropes and myths that shape our environmental imagination and action. Since ancient times European and other cultures have used such universal but also place specific metaphors as Garden, Wilderness, Virgin Land, Desert and Swamp to understand and describe their relationship with nature', in 'Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell's Ecocritical Perspective', *Koht ja Paik: Place and Location*, ed. by Kaia Lehari and Virve Sarapik (Tallin: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2000), 160-171 (pp. 160-161). Terry Gifford defines the pastoral as 'a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into drama, and more recently could be recognised in novels', *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.

¹¹ See the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: pointing towards 'bucolic poetry' and, in addition, to its meaning in post-classical Latin as pastor or minister. See also the definition in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, beginning 12. 156.

¹² *Encyclopédie*, entry by Jaucourt, 12. 156 and 12. 157. This definition also specifies that the 'églogue' often appears in the form of 'petits poèmes sur la vie champêtre', which are also described as 'idylles'. Jaucourt adds that in Greek this signifies 'une petite image, une peinture dans le genre gracieux et doux'. He further observes

sense, an artificially aestheticised trope, which, as Buell suggests, has come to refer, ‘not to the specific set of obsolescent conventions of the eclogue tradition, but to all literature – poetry or prose, fiction or non-fiction – that celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city’.¹³

By examining the literary influence of the pastoral trope, ecocritics such as Buell and Garrard highlight a number of key issues at the centre of ecocritical discourse. These include problems resulting from the environmentally destructive consequences of humanity’s cultural simplification of the natural world: diminishing its ecological complexity, for example, through various kinds of two-dimensional, artistic representation. Such romanticised portrayals of non-human nature subsequently influence ethical, environmental practices adopted by human communities, which, in turn, experience anxiety about irreversible changes within the biosphere: anxieties stemming from and perpetuated by idyllic depictions of the natural world. As Garrard further observes:

Classical pastoral precedes the perception of a general crisis in human ecology by thousands of years, but it provides the pre-existing set of literary conventions and cultural assumptions that have been crucially transformed to provide a way for Europeans and Euro-Americans to construct their landscape.¹⁴

In this way, representations of pastoral landscapes typically embody a kind of bucolic spatial imaginary, and, perhaps most importantly in the context of this study – which investigates Madame de Genlis’s use of a rural paradigm as a means of (re)forming the post-Revolutionary nation – such representations of landscape have the capacity to affect humankind’s relationship with the physical environment. Indeed, through an ecocritical lens, analysis of pastoral nature in Madame de Genlis’s texts casts light on the disjunction between literary and non-literary landscapes and, in addition, on the complex ways in which citizens help shape an imagined construct of the ‘natural’ and interact with the natural world itself. As Tiiu Speek observes:

When a country is presented as essentially greener, wilder, more pastoral than it is, we should ask whether literature represents idealized abstractions, turning nature into the service of cultural self-definition, or does it register actual places and their environmental realities.¹⁵

that ‘il semble que l’usage veut plus d’action et de mouvement dans l’églogue; et que dans l’idylle, on se contente d’y trouver des images, des récits ou des sentiments seulement’.

¹³ Buell, ‘American Pastoral Imagery Reappraised’, *American Literary History*, 1 (1989), 1-29 (p. 23).

¹⁴ Garrard, p. 38.

¹⁵ Speek, p. 163.

Such a question can be asked of historical, literary representations of the natural world. It is particularly relevant in the context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century national reconstruction in France; with regard to this study, it prompts us to assess the degree to which Madame de Genlis's rural model is realistic, questioning whether her depictions of the natural world are indeed used in the service of cultural self-definition – to construct a romanticised vision of the new nation – or whether they register the possibility of a productive, living landscape, brought about through her writing.

It is especially useful to return to Jaucourt's definition of the pastoral in the *Encyclopédie*, especially since this is a work which was scrutinised in detail by Madame de Genlis, who made use of it as a source of reference, although primarily in order to contest the points within. While Jaucourt's entry on the pastoral is distinctly secular in its tone – as opposed to Madame de Genlis's interpretation of divine nature – the ecocritical framework demonstrates how both writers explore the pastoral construct as one with the potential to reconfigure the citizen's relationship with the new nation. Although pastoral settings typically inspire, in Jaucourt's words, 'le règne de la liberté, des plaisirs innocents, de la paix, de ces biens pour lesquels tous les hommes se sentent nés, quand leurs passions leur laissent quelques moments de silence pour se reconnaître', pastoral landscapes, do not necessarily offer a reductive, sterile, or purely fictionalised depiction of the natural world.¹⁶ As Jaucourt's description indicates, they can provide an aesthetic space in which human beings are able to 'se reconnaître', that is, to explore the human condition in its supposedly organic or natural state, as well as to assess the way certain environments are conducive to the establishment of 'natural', political rights – here entitlement to 'la liberté', 'la paix' – 'biens pour lesquels tous les hommes se sentent nés'.

Ecocritical scholars draw attention to both the positive and negative socio-cultural – as well as environmental – implications of revised theoretical evaluations of pastoral, literary landscapes. Buell, for instance, suggests that the pastoral landscape is one best interpreted as a world seen through multiple sets of frames – ideological, perceptual, and literary – corresponding to a particular author's worldview, while, for Garrard, the 'emergent sensibility of Romantic pastoral' is 'a kind of radicalism not recognised by anthropocentric political critics', which is manifested in response to industrialisation and mechanisation in agriculture during the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Buell, in particular, highlights the seemingly

¹⁶ *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt 12. 156 and 12. 157.

¹⁷ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 49, and Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 38. As previously indicated

contradictory aspect of the genre, in that, for him, historically, the pastoral ‘has activated green consciousness’, and ‘sometimes euphemized land appropriation’.¹⁸ He believes, in addition, that ‘it may direct us towards the realm of physical nature, or it may abstract us from it’.¹⁹ Echoing Marx’s observations on the symbolic value of landscape more generally, in its pastoral form, it too is a ‘fetishized commodity’.²⁰ Often deemed timeless – epitomising the ideal of an eternal, perfect, natural world – the pastoral landscape may also, conversely, be time-specific or even outdated: indicative of belief in a kind of archaic ecological harmony now lost. Thus, corresponding to Marx’s notion of landscape as a ‘social hieroglyph’ – as discussed in the introduction to this thesis – the pastoral landscape, specifically, is an ‘emblem of the social relations it conceals’, steeped in various layers of socio-cultural and economic tradition.²¹ Accordingly, the pastoral is not merely an idealisation of the natural world, rather, as Paul Alpers argues in *What is Pastoral?*, when it is understood properly, the pastoral ‘can be seen to be far more aware of itself and its conditions than it has usually been thought to be, or even capable of being’.²²

The pastoral is a trope which allows for multiple readings, and it is clear that analysis of its use in literature sheds light on the ways in which representations of idyllic landscapes, such as those found in Madame de Genlis’s texts have implications for the way in which humankind interacts with its environment across various nested hierarchies, and, in addition, for the way its past interactions are understood and how these interactions continue to influence our ecological future. As Pippa Marland affirms in ‘Ecocriticism’, the current

in the introduction to this thesis, Garrard believes that the ‘classical pastoral was disposed, then, to distort or mystify social and environmental history, whilst at the same time providing a locus legitimised by tradition, for the feelings of loss or alienation from nature to be produced by the Industrial Revolution’, *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁸ Buell, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ This notion is discussed in more detail in the introduction to this thesis.

²¹ In addition to textual representation, landscape paintings also contribute to the pastoral trope. Studies such as Anne Bermingham’s *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1989) demonstrate how paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depict a class view of landscape. It reveals the ways in which landscapes provide an illusory account of the real countryside, locating the ideas they embody within the larger social, political and cultural structures which give them meaning. Similarly, John Barrell’s study of British poets and painters of the period between 1730 and 1840 in *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) exposes the trend amongst contemporary artists to depict country life, in painting, as a ‘continual struggle, at once to reveal more and more the actuality of the life of the poor, and to find more effective ways of concealing that actuality’, p. xii. Barrell’s research suggests that during this period the pastoral tradition gives way to the georgic mode but this had to be rendered in a way deemed acceptable to patrons who feared the uprising of the working classes. This is indicative of an aesthetic shift whereby, to turn once again to Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins’s study, *Gendering Landscape Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), rural imagery no longer prompted aesthetic appreciation but emerged as an ideological tool suggesting that ‘the poor of England were, or were capable of being, as happy as the swains of Arcadia’ (p. 6).

²² Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. xi.

ecological crisis requires that we reassess our behaviour in the world ‘with urgency’ since our cultural perceptions of ‘nature’ and ‘human’, and the relationship between the two, have to a great extent been responsible for ‘damaging these modes of being’.²³ Similarly, Worster, whose research on environmental history throughout the ages, in *The Wealth of Nature*, confirms the general absence of the natural world in humanity’s historical narratives, insists that the ‘cultural history of nature is as significant as the ecological history of culture’.²⁴ Moreover, he believes this to be the ‘core message’ of environmental history, a ‘paradox’ that we can ‘never fully escape’.²⁵ Jaucourt, who explicitly links the development of pastoral poetry – an age-old practice – with what he considers to be humanity’s oldest and most natural occupation, gives an explanation which goes some way towards illustrating Worster’s paradox: ‘si la poésie pastorale est née parmi les bergers, elle doit être un des plus anciens genres de poésie, la profession de berger étant la plus naturelle à l’homme, et la première qu’il ait exercée’.²⁶ Cultural anthropocentrism – and the texts it inspires – are, in this sense, inseparable from the history of human beings’ state of dwelling in their environment, despite the fact that this has not typically been acknowledged in scholarship.²⁷ Jaucourt’s shepherds are thus an illustration of the complex interrelation between humankind, the natural world, and cultural production: *la poésie pastorale* is therefore not only ‘un des plus anciens genres de poésie’, but also a cultural product which shapes environmental history.

²³ Pippa Marland, ‘Ecocriticism’, *Literature Compass*, 10 (2013), 846-868. Remaining up to date with the strategies required to address such issues is a seemingly impossible task. Clark, for example, stresses the ever-changing evaluative strategies required to redress a worsening crisis, arguing that ‘to try to conceptualise and engage the multiple factors behind the accelerating degradation of the planet is to reach for tools which must be remade even in the process of use’, Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. xiii.

²⁴ Worster, p. x.

²⁵ Worster, p. x. In his view, historians seem ‘to have forgotten completely that, until very recently, almost all people lived intimately with other species and with the wind and weather as they did with their own kin’. History, according to Worster, represents a dialogue between humanity and nature, ‘though it is usually reported as if it were a simple dictation’. Of American historians writing in the twentieth century, for example, he observes: ‘there was no nature in their history – no sense of the presence and influence of land on past human experience, no soil, no countryside, no smell of fungus, no sound of spring peepers trilling from the marsh at dusk’, p. vii.

²⁶ *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt, 12. 157.

²⁷ Worster asserts that, ‘Environmental history is, in sum, part of a revisionist effort to make the discipline far more inclusive in its narratives than it has traditionally been. Above all, it rejects the conventional assumption that human experience has been exempt from natural constraints, that people are a separate and ‘supernatural’ species, that the ecological consequences of their past deeds can be ignored. The old history could hardly deny that we have been living on the planet, but it assumed by its general disregard of that fact that we have not been and are not truly part of the planet’, in ‘Doing Environmental History’, in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. by Donald Worster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 289-307 (p. 290).

THE PASTORAL SHEPHERD IN MADAME DE GENLIS'S WRITING

The connection between the pastoral trope and the shepherd is well established: as Leo Marx succinctly puts it, 'no shepherd, no pastoral'.²⁸ Through an ecocritical lens, it is difficult to view representations of the pastoral shepherd in early nineteenth-century literature as a symbol of anything other than conflicted revolutionary consciousness: a response to turmoil in the very fabric of what was, in France, a predominantly agrarian society.²⁹ With roots in classical Greek tradition, as well as carrying marked biblical significance, the pastoral shepherd, in Madame de Genlis's writing, exists between the world of fiction and non-fiction: specifically, in portraits supposedly drawn from life, such as her account of the shepherds of Germany in her *Mémoires inédits*, and the shepherds of the Pyrenees in the *Souvenirs de Félicie*, as well as those in her fiction, such as the Greek shepherds in 'Alphonse et Dalinde ou la Féerie de l'art et de la nature' – a tale in *Les Veillées du château* – and finally, the shepherds of the Middle East in *Les Bergères de Madian, ou La Jeunesse de Moïse* (1812). A close reading of *Les Bergères de Madian*, in particular, will show how Madame de Genlis orients the traditional, pastoral shepherd away from the predominantly secular, or rather, mythologized vision of the rural idyll preferred by Jaucourt and the *philosophes*, towards a biblical interpretation of rural landscape, which contributes to her re-writing of the Revolutionary narrative.

The biblical story of Moses is one of alienation, exile, and triumphant repatriation, and it is therefore unsurprising that an author concerned with the plight of *émigrés* during the Revolution should choose this story as the basis for a pastoral text. What is perhaps unusual is that Madame de Genlis should focus on Moses's experience as a shepherd in the land of Midian, making this the subject of her 'poème en prose en six chants', *Les Bergères de*

²⁸ Leo Marx, 'Pastoralism in America', in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 36-69 (p. 45). See also Javier Irigoyen-García, *The Spanish Arcadia: Sheep Herding, Pastoral Discourse, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014) and Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁹ William Blake's 'The Shepherd', for example, a poem and hand-painted illustration featured in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789), according to its full title, aims to capture 'the two contrary states of the human soul', linking them to the two allegorical states of paradise and fall. It contains what is perhaps the most well-known depiction of a shepherd as an emblem of anti-industrial spirit, also standing against mass-produced art. Swept aside to the edges of enlightenment discourse, scholarship has neglected the significance of the pastoral shepherd in shaping the aesthetics of post-Revolutionary nation-building. Blake's shepherd is undoubtedly a Christ-like figure, and yet, this figure who 'shall follow his sheep all the day' rather than leading them, cultivates an ecologically balanced relationship with non-human nature. Despite Jaucourt's contention that the profession of shepherd is the oldest and most 'natural' in human history, the figure of the shepherd has been neglected in ecocritical study.

Madian, ou la jeunesse de Moïse.³⁰ In Exodus 2. 22, Moses states, 'I have become an alien in a foreign land', a sentiment which echoes Madame de Genlis's frequent references to her experience of exile, particularly in her *Mémoires inédits*.³¹ Exploring the altered city of Paris upon her return to France, she writes of her visit to a *brocanteur*, recalling, for example, that: 'mes yeux se remplirent de larmes en pensant que les trois quarts des infortunés nobles que ces peintures représentaient avaient été guillotins, et que les autres, dépouillés de tout et proscrits, erraient peut-être encore dans les pays étrangers'.³² Her sadness is magnified by the sight of such portraits with incidents such as this fuelling her desire to re-attribute lost socio-cultural status to the nobility through her pastoral narratives: that is, Madame de Genlis displaces the 'infortunés nobles' from one aesthetic realm to another.

Taking Moïse from *Les Bergères de Madian* as an example of a displaced noble figure, Madame de Genlis depicts the *émigré* as a leader within a re-imagined, divine landscape. David L. Jeffrey in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* argues that the pastoral shepherd is often used as a metaphor for rulers and an early symbol of nationhood:

The Shepherd, and associated pastoral imagery, forms something like a totemic badge for the Hebrew nation: sheep-herding was the patriarch's way of life, and their self-identification as such kept them 'separate' in Egypt, 'for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians' (Genesis 46. 34). Indeed, most biblical usage stresses this paradox of humility and lowliness combined with hidden favour, the quality of being chosen: Moses and David, the most famous shepherds, exemplify a pattern of emerging from obscurity to manifest God's choice of the unregarded or despised as appointed leaders [...]. This theme, that of the obscure but chosen instrument, links the shepherd to such motifs as the reluctant leader (e.g. Gideon, Saul, Jeremiah, and Moses) and the younger son (e.g. Jacob, Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Ephraim, David and Solomon): the youngest of the family was often given the shepherd's duty.³³

In addition to emphasising the role of the shepherd as worthy leader of a displaced nation or scattered people, Jeffrey identifies a number of themes which also emerge in Madame de Genlis's writing: the suggestion that obscurity may be preparation for greatness, that hidden favour marks the lives of both the high and low born, and that the moral qualities

³⁰ *Les Bergères de Madian, ou la jeunesse de Moïse* (Paris: Galignani, 1812).

³¹ Exodus 2. 22. The Book of Exodus tells the story of the birth and youth of Moses. Pharaoh, the wicked king of the Egyptians decrees that all male Hebrew children be killed (Exodus 1. 16; 1. 22), but the infant Moses is saved by the Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2. 1-10) who draws him out of a basket in the water. Afraid of being punished by Pharaoh for killing an Egyptian, Moses flees to the land of Midian (Exodus 2. 15). After Pharaoh's death, the Lord directs Moses to return to Egypt (Exodus 4. 19).

³² *Mémoires inédits*, V. 86.

³³ *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by David L. Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 710.

distinguishing the lowly shepherd and the powerful king are ideally the same, with their social traits and ideologies alike.³⁴ Thus, the shepherd's watchfulness and concern for others, including the least member of his flock, is an expression of ecologically sensitive behaviour, befitting an emperor or king. In addition, Jeffrey's emphasis on the shepherd as a biblical motif recalls to mind the notion of God or a divine intelligence governing the processes of the natural world, forming a parallel with Madame de Genlis's writing, in which divine intercession informs the kinds of interrelation that exist between members of the ecological community across their various nested hierarchies.

In choosing Moïse as the protagonist of her prose poem, Madame de Genlis draws a compelling parallel between two experiences of the horrors of exile: that of Moïse and that of the French *émigrés*. In the bible it is stated that humankind will go 'into exile' for its 'lack of understanding', will be 'brought low and humbled', and, subsequently, that 'sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich'; this image mirrors Volnis's suggestion that the nobility had merited their downfall through unsustainable and lavish displays of wealth in the years preceding the Revolution.³⁵ Reflecting on his experience of exile, as he contemplates the extent of the agricultural labour which will be required in order to re-establish his property, he asks his wife, 'n'avons-nous pas mérité, par trop d'imprévoyance, trop de goût pour le faste, d'être bannis, du moins pour un temps, du paradis terrestre?'.³⁶ Furthermore, the use of biblical imagery constitutes Madame de Genlis's effort to re-imbue the natural world with 'purposive' force, to restore the 'web of relations', and to re-establish 'political order' as a form of 'organic community'.

Each of the six *chants* of *Les Bergères de Madian* relates a distinct episode in Moïse's youth. In the *chant premier*, for example, having killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew slave, he is obliged to flee and seeks refuge amongst the *Madianite* shepherds, fearing the wrath of 'un tyran sanguinaire'.³⁷ He leaves the 'terre barbare' of Egypt, for the wilderness, 'au milieu d'une nuit obscure et sombre', filled with sadness: 'ses larmes coulaient'.³⁸ Strikingly, the language in the text is similar to that used in the *Maison rustique*

³⁴ See Colin Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France: Work, Health, and Education among the 'Classes Populaires'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). He notes that the peasant 'was the least specialised of all workers: he could at once be farmer, shepherd, road-mender, woodcutter and industrial worker. The process of acquiring all the skills and lore of this existence was necessarily a long one, which was grafted on to the more urgent business of earning one's keep' (p. 41). This recalls Madame de Genlis's description of her extremely practical programme of education for Louis-Philippe.

³⁵ Isaiah 5. 15; 5. 17.

³⁶ *Maison rustique*, I. 13.

³⁷ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

to describe the fleeing villagers who cross the fields with tears streaming: 'ils traversèrent en pleurant les champs fertilisés par eux, et dont des mains impies et sanguinaires devaient recueillir la récolte'.³⁹ Without the guidance of their *seigneur*, Volnis – who experiences first-hand 'les misères de l'exil et les amertumes de l'expatriation' – or their 'bon curé' – who finds himself 'sur un rivage étranger' – the villagers are like lost sheep who abandon their homeland in despair.⁴⁰ Moïse too faces the prospect of inhabiting uncultivated lands: 'proscrit, fugitif, il cherchait un asile, et il ne découvrait que des lieux inconnus et sauvages, des terres inhabitées'.⁴¹ Like Jeffrey's sketch of the biblical shepherd as a 'totemic badge for the Hebrew nation', Moïse's story mirrors that of the displaced French *émigrés*, and he becomes a symbol of powerful cultural patriotism which elevates the lone or alienated nature dweller in Madame de Genlis's writing to a figure of political resistance.⁴²

A stereotypical protagonist of *la poésie pastorale*, the 'jeune Moïse' is described as 'le plus beau des Hébreux'.⁴³ He wanders the wild terrain in exile, lost in the Sinai desert. From the outset, the reader is confronted by the juxtaposition of a mythological Greek image of the natural world and a biblical interpretation of this strange environment: the conflicted Moïse must resist the temptation to see false Gods and distorted symbolism in these alien surroundings. He exclaims: 'je ne veux m'égarer sur les bords du Permesse et de Castalie, je vais puiser dans une source plus pure!'.⁴⁴ Alluding to the river dedicated to the Muses, 'séduisantes et trompeuses', and to the fountain of Castalia – whose respective waters were believed to inspire poetry, music, and art – Moïse rejects Greek mythology, and its connotations of idyll, as a means of understanding nature, and moreover, as a poetic representation of his environment.⁴⁵ Moïse's distorted reality is the product of his imagination, which he hopes to eliminate through his faith in God and through a divine interpretation of nature. Referring to the Muses once again, this time as 'les filles brillantes de l'erreur', he cries out, 'c'est n'est plus vous que je puis invoquer!', suggestive of his

³⁹ *Maison rustique*, I. 3. In the *Épître à l'asile que j'aurai* (1796), Madame de Genlis uses similar terminology: 'une retraite chéri', and an 'asile désiré, mais encore inconnu' (p. 5).

⁴⁰ *Maison rustique*, I. 2.

⁴¹ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 4. The wilderness is specified in terms of geographical reality: 'les plaines arides de Socoth et l'antique forêt d'Etham'. Kerkalis, in the 'Malencontreux', is also described as 'errant et proscrit' (p. 3).

⁴² This is a danger which Buell has already anticipated, by making explicit the connection between representations of idyllic rural scenes in literature and the development of nationalistic tendencies, when he states: 'the modern transmutation that concerns me most is the enlistment of the pastoral in the service of local, regional, and national particularism', Buell, p. 31.

⁴³ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. In Greek mythology Castalia was believed to have been a nymph transformed into a fountain by Apollo.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

intention to turn, instead, to God.⁴⁶

Recognising the danger of such culturally constructed, poetic landscapes which, although alluringly beautiful, seem to resist human domination, he seeks to ‘disenchant’ his surroundings – to borrow Bennett’s expression once again – exorcising the landscape of the Greek mythological beings which have traditionally infused it with meaning, in order to re-enchant it with Christian imagery. In the post-Revolutionary French context, and in a world which Madame de Genlis fears is becoming increasingly secularised – where she finds ‘des philosophes substitués aux saints’ and ‘les saints remplacés par les sans-culottides et par des oignons, des choux’ – these mythological beings no longer register as harmless symbols of that ‘same order of objects interacting with one another in the same way’, in Worster’s words.⁴⁷ Moïse commands the mythical figures to leave: ‘vains fantômes produits par l’imagination, disparaissent des bois, Sylvaines, Dryades, Nymphes légères’.⁴⁸ Divine elimination of these ‘fantômes’ requires no exaggerated supernatural display of power, it is simply God’s presence in the natural world: ‘que l’éclat de la Majesté divine vous fasse évanouir, comme les rayons du jour dissipent les ombres de la nuit’.⁴⁹ As Moïse wanders through the desert alone, he therefore differentiates between what he dismisses as the hollow symbolism which has been projected onto the landscape through one kind of shared cultural memory over time, and what he sees as evidence of divine intelligence in the natural world: replacing one form of enchantment with another.⁵⁰

Despite his own self-awareness, and the apparent desire to detach himself from the established poetic tradition, Moïse’s numerous references to Greek mythology prepare readers for a re-orientation or re-imagination of the pastoral trope through the placement of two supernatural paradigms – the mythological and the biblical – side by side, which ultimately confirms his own rootedness in a fictionalised, literary landscape. In the post-Revolutionary intellectual climate, however, the notion of the natural idyll is losing its force and the idea of biblical authority is waning. Neither the pastoral nor the biblical, as literary constructs, provide an adequate means of understanding Revolutionary upheaval, and thus, Madame de Genlis employs both in order to validate the rural model: attributing new

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 85 (original emphasis).

⁴⁸ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ This also occurs in ‘Alphonse et Dalinde’, as illustrated in the second chapter of this thesis. Madame de Genlis writes: ‘le goût de l’histoire naturelle suffirait seule pour rendre agréable le séjour de la campagne. Cette idée m’a fait imaginer le conte intitulée *Alphonse et Dalinde ou la féerie de l’art et de la nature*’, *Les Veillées du château*, I. viii. Rather than being a fairy story, natural wonders such as volcanoes and earthquakes are presented as awe-inspiring and miraculous.

significance to a well-known rural figure. Just as, in exile in the desert, he is in an interstitial zone, Moïse also occupies the literary space between fiction and reality: the rural shepherd would have been a common sight in rural France, and yet Moïse, as poet and harpist, is also a figure of culture.⁵¹ The shepherd, for Madame de Genlis, is at once a symbol of simplicity as well as being a complex figure capable of interpreting socio-cultural significance of the natural world. Accordingly, use of the pastoral in *Les Bergères de Madian* transcends a purely romanticised representation of nature, and can be aligned with scholar August Heckscher's more recent reflections on the consequences of the citizen's estrangement from the socio-political world. In *The Public Happiness*, which also touches upon themes such as alienation and isolation, he offers the following commentary on social upheaval:

The movement from a view of life as essentially simple and orderly to a view of life as complex and ironic is what every individual passes through in becoming mature. But certain epochs encourage this development; in them the paradoxical or dramatic outlook colors the whole intellectual scene [...] Amid simplicity and order rationalism is born, but rationalism proves inadequate in any period of upheaval. Then equilibrium must be created out of opposites. Such inner peace as men gain must represent a tension among contradictions and uncertainties [...] A feeling for paradox allows seemingly dissimilar things to exist side by side, their very incongruity suggesting a kind of truth.⁵²

A view of rural life as simple and orderly – such as that evoking Jaucourt's rural idyll, for example – must also become complex and ironic as it undergoes revolutionary changes which force upon it a certain maturing process: a new equilibrium between continuity and change is created in *Les Bergères de Madian*. The so-called 'classical pastoral', in her texts, therefore becomes complex and ironic following Revolutionary upheaval. The interplay between the Greek mythological and biblical devices thus serves as the imaginational foundation upon which the author constructs new meaning within and across her texts – a hybrid blend which is, in many ways, the hallmark of her style.⁵³

In *Les Hermites des Marais Pontins* (1802), for instance – a tale supposedly true to life, which recounts the journey of Madame d'Orléans through Italy during the Revolutionary

⁵¹ See Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France*. He asserts that during the nineteenth century, '[children] usually began their working lives as shepherds, *la garde des bestiaux* being the task most commonly associated with a rural childhood' (p. 28).

⁵² August Heckscher, *The Public Happiness* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1962), p. 102.

⁵³ On this note, Bookchin observes that 'in the Greek mind, the *polis*, which included its well-tilled environs, waged a constant battle against the encroachment of the unruly natural world and its barbarian denizens. Within its confines, the *polis* created a space not only for discourse, rationality, and the 'good life,' but even for the *oikos*, which at least had its own realm of order, however prepolitical in character', in *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 179. From this perspective, the use of Greek imagery is a means of creating a poetic form of *polis*.

period – inhabitants of desolate rural communities, which are not led by religious figures, are akin to the mythological conjurations of the wilderness experienced by Moïse: ‘les infortunés habitants, pâles et livides, ressemblent à des fântomes’ and ‘la nature même y paraît languissante’.⁵⁴ The young Madame d’Orléans travels a road ‘qui retrace tant de souvenirs et de faits mémorables de l’histoire ancienne et moderne’.⁵⁵ Set against her constructed memories of the once glorious Roman Empire, the ‘infortunés habitants’, whose village fields lie desolate and uncultivated, are thus like ghosts whose presence evokes an image of a rural idyll lost in time: they might as well be the ‘vains fantômes’ produced by Moïse’s imagination. Neither Madame d’Orléans nor Moïse has experienced such memories directly, but these images produced by the natural world form part of a shared cultural memory through which they understand their environment. A tension is discernable, therefore, in Madame de Genlis’s writing, which overshadows the presence of a dichotomy between fiction and non-fiction and, instead, points towards an increasing desire to reduce the distance between pastoral representations of landscapes, their biblical counterparts and those emblematic of geographical reality.

Notably, in the *Mémoires inédits*, describing a period of her emigration spent in Hamburg and in the region of Holstein, Madame de Genlis relates her experience of staying with a family of shepherds: ‘C’était dans un lieu appelé Brevel, une véritable chaumière de roman, dont les habitants étaient des personnages d’églogue’.⁵⁶ This real life cottage, humble but charming, is seen through a literary lens, from which its poetic quality derives: it is a ‘véritable chaumière de roman’. She further describes the ‘maître de la ferme’, M. Pétersen, and his relatives:

Sa famille était composée de sa femme, de sa fille, âgée de dix-neuf ans, nommée Lena, et la plus belle bergère que j’aie jamais vue, et d’un fils qui avait vingt-deux ans, et qui était aussi un véritable berger d’idylle.⁵⁷

Intending to register an actual place and its environmental reality, Madame de Genlis idealises the rustic simplicity of this family’s life, explicitly connecting them to the notion of

⁵⁴ *Les Hermites des Marais Pontins* (Paris: Maradan, 1814), pp. 10-11. The text was written in 1776 and it was published in 1802. The Pontine Marshes have been, since Roman times, an extensive subject of debate related to humankind’s ability to reclaim productive land from lying in waste.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 344. Following a period of exile in Germany, she considers the country as a home from home: ‘Je m’intéressai de toute ma vie à la prospérité de Berlin, de cette brillante et belle ville, si sagement gouvernée, ancien et moderne refuge des malheureux fugitifs français’, *Suite de souvenirs de Félicie L****, p. 277.

⁵⁷ *Mémoires inédits*, V. 344.

idyll. This ‘imitation de la vie champêtre représentée avec tous ses charmes possibles’, emphasises the stability, peace and harmony which characterises the family and their surroundings while presenting an example of rural life which remains within the realm of possibility.⁵⁸ Madame de Genlis understands the environment and, consequently, its relationship to the nation through fiction, and, in texts such as the *Maison rustique* and *Les Bergères de Madian*, reality and fiction collide.

The allusion to the nymphs and the daughters of Zeus in *Les Bergères de Madian* is, in this way, a means of anticipating the appearance of the pure, chaste, biblical *bergères* of the title, and, in addition, the evocation of the waters of Permesse and Castalie foreshadows Moïse’s act of drawing out water from the well on their behalf.⁵⁹ Rather than nymphs, Moïse eventually encounters the ‘sept jeunes bergères conduisant un troupeau de brebis’ who are like ‘tendres fleurs, cultivées jusqu’alors à l’abri de l’orage et par la même main’.⁶⁰ Contrasted with the ‘filles brillantes de l’erreur’, the innocent shepherdesses, as ‘tendres fleurs’, are shown to be rooted in the real since they are described in terms of the natural world around them. Similarly, in this context, the use of the verb ‘puiser’ – when Moïse states ‘je vais puiser dans une source plus pure’ – is also significant. It emphasises Moïse’s status as a figure of socio-cultural importance in his own right, since it echoes the meaning of his name in Hebrew – signifying to ‘draw out [of water]’ or ‘saved from the waters’ – since, as so often in biblical tradition, his name is significant in the context of the story.

Like the flowers in the *Botanique* or the *Herbier moral*, Moïse’s name is symbolic of

⁵⁸ A further example of the blurring of fiction and reality in the construction of pastoral spaces is to be found in the *Mémoires inédits*. Madame de Genlis gives an account of walking up the *Montagne des deux amants*, explaining the tradition which gives this mountain its name. Once called the inaccessible mountain owing to the impossibility of reaching its summit, she relates the story of a young shepherd of the valley could only obtain the hand of the girl with whom he was in love, by carrying her to the summit on his shoulders. In the local village it was believed that this condition would put an end to the connection but since ‘l’amour ne doute rien’ – the shepherd laughs in the face of the mortal anxiety of the village, and reaches the top only to die. His bride throws herself into the river : ‘telle est la tradition, qui a l’air d’une allégorie; car, en effet, l’amour promet tout, et après avoir tout obtenu il expire!’. In reality, when Madame de Genlis reaches the summit of the mountain, she experience the hospitality of the *hermites* who live there: ‘nous savions qu’elle avait un ermitage sur son sommet; ainsi nous étions bien assurées de pouvoir faire ce que faisaient les ermites, ou pour mieux dire les religieux, car c’était un petit couvent’. Upon reaching the top they encounter ‘de bons religieux’ who provide them with refreshments and a pastoral view of the landscape ‘leur petit couvent, placé au milieu de la plate-forme de la montagne, était charmant; on y découvrait de partout une vue ravissante’. The religious hermits have therefore overcome and usurped the tragic tale of the shepherds. ‘Ces pieux solitaires’, she observes, ‘planaient encore sur le monde qu’ils avaient quitté; ils n’en voyaient que ce qu’il y a de plus vertueux, les travaux de la campagne. J’enviai leur demeure et leur tranquillité; car, même au milieu du tourbillon du monde et de la dissipation, je n’ai jamais entrevu sans une profonde émotion, l’image d’une solitude et d’un paix sans nuages’. She adds that ‘je ne prévoyais pas alors, que vingt-deux ans après ce couvent serait détruit, et ces vertueux habitants dispersés avec violence, et peut-être immolés!’, *Mémoires inédits*, I. 74-75.

⁵⁹ Madame de Genlis describes ‘les sept filles, qui étant venues pour puiser de l’eau’, one of whom – Séphora – eventually becomes Moïse’s wife, *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 160.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24, p. 25.

the qualities he possesses.⁶¹ Having been rescued from the water by the Pharaoh's daughter as an infant, Moïse himself is capable, not only of drawing out water – synonymous with life – from the arid desert, as he does for Séphora's flock at the well, but also of drawing divine meaning from his surroundings. Herding 'ses brebis dans le désert', he is enlightened through divine knowledge: 'plongé dans de sublimes méditations, son âme, détachée de la terre, s'élançait avec ardeur dans le sein de l'Eternel, et commençait à y puiser cette intelligence supérieure, ces lumières surnaturelles'.⁶² The 'obscure but chosen instrument' of God described by Jeffrey, Moïse reaches conclusions about human interaction with nature through his experience of the divine even in the most uninhabitable of spaces.⁶³ Not only does this allow him to become an informed, ecologically sensitive leader, but in addition, as poet and protagonist, he is able to inspire new, lasting images of national triumph over adversity which further contribute to the 'imagined community'. He is able, for example, to lead the people through the desert to an irrigated land where 'les jeunes vierges d'Israël remplirent d'eau des vases d'argile qu'elles avaient apportés': the pure daughters of Israël look forward to a prosperous, self-sufficient future.⁶⁴

Through Moïse's re-appropriation of the pastoral poetic genre, and the exclusion of the mythological imaginary, Madame de Genlis reconfigures the desert landscape – 'ces effrayantes solitudes' – as pastoral.⁶⁵ Much like Buell's suggestion that the pastoral is a frame through which to view the world, Madame de Genlis's pastoral is shown to represent the agricultural potential of the land. With renewed perspective, Moïse describes, for example, 'ces oliviers, ces dattiers chargés de fruits, ces sources abondantes, ces cavernes profondes qui semblent faites pour servir de refuge au fugitif poursuivi', this last expression serving to reinforce the parallel between biblical and Revolutionary contexts.⁶⁶ In Moïse's eyes, the desert becomes not only a place of refuge, but also, a site of abundance, just as Volnis identifies the potential for cultivating afresh his barren land. Furthermore, Moïse relishes this tangible, almost supernatural wealth in nature, which, for him, stands in contrast to the fruitless scene associated with Greek myth; and as he does so it is striking that he talks of

⁶¹ See Exodus 2. 10: 'When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water"'. A footnote indicates that 'Moses' sounds like the Hebrew for draw out. In *Les Bergères de Madian* itself, Madame de Genlis notes that 'sauvé des eaux est, en hébreux, la signification du nom de Moïse', p. 54.

⁶² *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 116.

⁶³ His command over nature, and water specifically, for example, is also demonstrated by his parting of the red sea in the Bible (Exodus 14. 21).

⁶⁴ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

enchantment which, as we have seen is one of the key themes in contemporary ecocritical discourse: ‘je ne me lassais point de contempler ce spectacle enchanteur’.⁶⁷ ‘Ces effrayantes solitudes’ are not spaces in which to feel isolated or alone, but rather, in which to re-establish a connection to the ecosphere: it is, once again, an opportunity to re-enchante the landscape through the divine.

With food and shelter provided for, Moïse has more leisure to contemplate his physical surroundings, and to feel at ease in the landscape, thereby overcoming the feeling of alienation from human community – specifically, his exile from Egypt. Entering a state of ‘sublimes méditations’ whereby his soul is ‘détachée de la terre’, and thus freed from the ecological constraints of necessity, his mind turns towards more abstract thoughts, enabling him to ‘puiser cette intelligence supérieure, ces lumières surnaturelles’ and to consider his surrounding with renewed purpose. Francis Marcoin, in his study of Enlightenment and Romanticism in Madame de Genlis’s *Les Petits Émigrés* (1798), contends that: ‘l’émigration apparaît alors comme lieu et moment d’élaboration d’un rapport romantique au monde, favorisé par la coloration romanesque donnée à ces existences et les endroits pittoresques, par les paysages mêmes où s’est réfugiée l’aristocratie’.⁶⁸ And yet, analysis of Moïse as shepherd in *Les Bergères de Madian* reveals a more complicated, nuanced relationship between the exiled figure and the wild landscapes he comes to inhabit: one which embodies the inherited literary traditions of the pastoral as paradise as well as one which seeks to transform the citizen’s understanding of the natural world.

Beyond ‘la coloration romanesque’ and descriptions of ‘les endroits pittoresques’, Madame de Genlis’s re-appropriation of the pastoral trope provides an aesthetic space in which to recast the lowly shepherd as both moral and cultured: a figure who is able to emerge from obscurity as leader of a nation. In this sense, she looks beyond a merely pastoral, or two-dimensional, representation of the environment towards a more balanced depiction of the ecosphere. A purely Romanticised nature is one which neglects the interactions within and across nested communities, and, as a result, the essence of the narrative of exile: the story of the nation she is seeking to glorify in writing. Seeking examples of balance in nature, in her *Mémoires inédits*, she states: ‘J’ai remarqué qu’à la gloire de la nation française et de la nature humaine chaque atrocité a été expiée par des actions sublimes dans un genre opposé

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶⁸ Francis Marcoin, ‘*Les Petits Émigrés*, entre lumières et romantisme’, in *Madame de Genlis: littérature et éducation*, ed. by François Bessire and Martine Reid (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008), pp. 69-82 (p. 73).

dans les mêmes situations'.⁶⁹ Elsewhere in her writing she confirms a tendency towards an anti-Romantic picture of non-human nature. In the *Dictionnaire critique*, for instance, she writes:

Nos poètes, dans leurs grands ouvrages, uniquement occupés des lacs, des fleuves, des mers, des paysages pittoresques, des rochers et des cavernes, finiront par oublier qu'il existe des créatures humaines, dont les passions, les affections et les sentiments peuvent intéresser.⁷⁰

By contrast, Moïse's range of 'passions', 'affections' and 'sentiments' are integral to the narrative of her prose poem. These shape the direction of the poem and inform Moïse's thoughts about the natural world as he seeks to re-establish the notion of home as both a physical and a spatial imaginary, calling to mind once again Blunt's and Dowling's notion of a 'set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places'.⁷¹ The prose poem captures a set of intersecting ideas about humanity's engagement with the divine through non-human nature, relating these to the context of exile, which construct new spatial imaginaries across literary traditions and temporalities: linking a 'historical' biblical narrative with present realities while looking forward to a redeemed future. The leading narrative arc of *Les Bergères de Madian* is therefore concerned with the means by which one particular 'créature humaine' learns to connect with his landscape and to reclaim it as home through Divine Providence. Before the text reaches its end, as well as vanquishing the enemies who contribute to his alienation from his *patrie*, Moïse has merited 'ses hautes destinées par l'exercice de toutes les vertus paisibles, si chères à l'humanité et si précieuses aux yeux du Créateur'.⁷² He achieves this not only through the pastoral arts of poetry and music, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, but also, by way of a more brutal display of strength.

⁶⁹ *Mémoires inédits*, VIII. 101.

⁷⁰ *Dictionnaire critique*, p. 54. Romanticism, according to Marilyn Butler, 'is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and continues to experience since the middle of the eighteenth century', in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 184. See also Roy Osamu Kamada, *Postcolonial Romanticisms: Landscape and the Possibilities of Inheritance* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 5. Furthermore, in *Le dernier voyage de Nelgis* (Paris: Roux Libraire, Palais-Royal, 1828), the story of the octogenarian Comte de Nelgis (an anagram of Genlis), Madame de Genlis lists Mademoiselle Gai, M. Vergniaud and M. de Lamartine as examples of young writers whose work romanticises nature but does not necessarily offer a practical model: 'de jeunes auteurs nous ont donné dernièrement de belles méditations en vers et en prose et qui ont obtenu les plus justes succès. Il m'a paru qu'il restait encore à faire des méditations en action' (p. vii).

⁷¹ Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 2.

⁷² *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 150.

In the *chant cinquième*, for example, Moïse appears as a leader in the eyes of the *Madianites*, ‘porté par les bergers; son troupeau rassemblé marchait devant lui’ carrying ‘au bout d’une pique, la tête sanglante d’un lion’.⁷³ Moïse kills the lion in order to save a mother and her child and is proclaimed ‘libérateur d’un village entier’.⁷⁴ This image of humankind’s triumph over non-human nature – the lion’s head is the ‘monument effrayant de la victoire de Moïse’ – stands in contrast to Jeffrey’s conclusion regarding what he describes as ‘the most idyllic of the “messianic” prophecies of Isaiah, e.g. [Isaiah] 11. 1-9, where “a little child shall lead” all the world’s creatures, lion and lamb together in a flock’.⁷⁵ It is again evidence of the interstitial space between pastoral and biblical, between fiction and reality: especially since there is no account of Moses encountering a lion in the Bible. And yet, it seems that this image of Moïse as a strong, self-sufficient leader must be compatible with the post-Revolutionary context – with leaders capable of using violence should their homeland become threatened, and of dominating alien communities by way of force. In this way, the slaughter of the lion serves as one example of violence in the text which contradicts Jaucourt’s suggestion of the need for literary censorship in *la poésie pastorale*:

Tout ce qui se passe à la campagne, n’est donc point digne d’entrer dans la poésie pastorale. On ne doit en prendre que ce qui est de nature à plaire ou à intéresser; par conséquent, il faut exclure les grossièretés, les choses dures, les menus détails, qui ne font que des images oisives et muettes; en un mot, tout ce qui n’a rien de piquant ni de doux. À plus forte raison, les événements atroces et tragiques ne pourront y entrer: un berger qui s’étrangle à la porte de sa bergère, n’est point un spectacle pastoral; parce que dans la vie des bergers, on ne doit point connaître les degrés des passions qui mènent à de tels emportements.⁷⁶

In order to come to terms with the realities of exile – through which figures such as Moïse and Volnis are connected – and its consequences for the French nation, Madame de Genlis attempts to reconcile truth and fiction in her writing. ‘Les grossièretés, les choses dures, les menus détails’, must, by necessity be present if her poem is to adequately capture the plight of the *émigré*.

At the same time, pastoral imagery provides counterbalance and is a means through which to eulogise exile. This allows her to create an aesthetic space in order to (re)construct an imagined community which can be integrated into the social body of knowledge, that is, to maintain a sense of tradition as well as socio-cultural relevance, while remaining faithful to

⁷³ Ibid., p. 123

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 125 and Jeffrey, p. 711.

⁷⁶ *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt 12. 156, 12. 157.

the religious values that underpin her rural model. As she observes in her entry on ‘aumônes’ in the *Dictionnaire critique*: ‘on peut être humain et libéral sans religion; mais jamais la compassion naturelle ne produira ces actions, ces sacrifices, et les dévouements sublimes dont la piété offre une si grande multitude d’exemples’.⁷⁷ In her view, so-called ‘natural’ compassion, as understood by *les philosophes*, will not distinguish human beings beyond the humane and liberal qualities which are, ideally, the fundamental characteristics of French citizens.⁷⁸ It is piety which elevates the soul to the sublime, an experience which is therefore connected to an aesthetic contemplation of the natural world, while justifying the rural model, with its divine hierarchies. Inseparable from a seemingly pastoral construction of the natural world, characters such as Moïse are ‘chosen instruments’ of God, set to work as humble servants within a morally perfect order.

THE AESTHETIC OF SOLITUDE IN THE PASTORAL LANDSCAPE

Moïse’s ability to read or interpret the landscape through multiple frames is, in fact, a mark of both moral and cultural distinction which differentiates this shepherd from his people. In keeping with an ecocritical reading of Jaucourt’s pastoral as an aesthetic space in which to explore the human condition, Moïse is able to construct a moral spatial imaginary for his reader. More than simply a static backdrop, the desert landscape is converted into an idyllic, peaceful space in which it is possible to experience ‘quelques moments de silence pour se reconnaître’. Jaucourt further elaborates upon this line of thought when he specifies that the pastoral trope, ‘en un mot, c’est la retraite commode et riante d’un homme qui a le cœur simple et en même temps délicat, et qui a trouvé le moyen de faire revenir pour lui cet heureux siècle [de l’âge d’or]’.⁷⁹ In this case, the ‘retraite commode’ which recalls a ‘heureux siècle’ is not the image of Arcadia, but rather, the notion of home or homeland which corresponds to the biblical promised land, simultaneously considered by Moïse to be a geographical reality and the natural world construed as God’s heavenly kingdom on Earth. Only having rid his imagination of ‘vains fantômes’ and, subsequently, learnt to distinguish

⁷⁷ *Dictionnaire critique*, I. 57.

⁷⁸ As evidenced by Julie’s conduct in ‘Le Philosophe pris au mot’.

⁷⁹ *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt, 12. 157.

‘toutes ces images variées et brillantes [qui] ne sont que des illusions’ from that which represents an eternal, moral order can he truly experience the divine in nature.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the fictional narrative, ‘Les Cinq premières semaines d’un journal écrit dans les Pyrénées’, which concludes *L’Étude du cœur humain*. Madame de Genlis writes:

L’homme [...] lorsqu’il n’est pas dépravé, il se fait toujours de la retraite une idée agréable; ce mot même *solitude* a de l’élégance et du charme. Que signifierait cette inclination, si nous ne pouvions trouver dans un désert que nos souvenirs? Ce serait un goût contre la nature; car il serait souverainement déraisonnable. Mais c’est l’idée de la Divinité qui, même vague et confuse, donne tant d’intérêt à la solitude, et tant de solennité aux forêts et aux contrées sauvages. L’athée doit haïr la solitude, ses pensées y sont stériles comme le néant.⁸⁰

In solitude, which is not to be confused with loneliness or isolation – since an aesthetic experience of solitude occurs within the ecosystem as a ‘retraite’ in nature – human beings experience the divine. Those who have nothing but their own experiences to call upon, rather than being able to explore ‘l’idée de la Divinité’ and ‘to puiser cette intelligence supérieure’, as Moïse does, are deemed as having ‘un goût contre la nature’. Accordingly, atheists, for Madame de Genlis, cannot productively fertilise the land because they exist outside of the divine moral order. This is in contrast to characters such as Volnis, who is able to successfully cultivate a barren landscape – ‘cette terre, jadis fertilisée par nous, reprendra bientôt toute sa fécondité: tandis que nous en étions bannis, elle n’a produit que des épines!’ – and even the unfortunate Kerkalis, who wishes to ‘vivifier ce triste désert’.⁸¹ In this regard, once the ‘Sylvaines, Dryades, Nymphes légères’ have disappeared from the active imagination, contemplation of the natural world – for the atheist, in Madame de Genlis’s view – is a sterile, unproductive experience.

Additionally, in *L’Étude du cœur humain*, the author also suggests that ‘ce n’est que dans la solitude que l’on peut être véritablement philanthrope et bienfaisant. Rien n’y distrait de la bonté, et dans le monde tout s’y oppose, ou tout en détourne’.⁸² Moral action, it seems,

⁸⁰ *L’Étude du cœur humain*, pp. 179-180 (original emphasis).

⁸¹ *Maison rustique*, II. 4, and ‘Le Malencontreux’, II. 4.

⁸² *L’Étude du cœur humain*, p. 229. Notable is Arendt’s argument that ‘As Epictetus sees it (*Dissertationes*, Book 3, Chapter 3), the lonely man (*eremos*) finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed. The solitary man, on the contrary, is alone and therefore can be “together with himself” since men have the capacity of “talking with themselves” in solitude. In other words, I am “by myself”, together with myself, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others’, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Harvest Book, 1968), p. 476. Furthermore, Arendt writes: ‘For confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people; and it is the great saving grace of companionship for solitary men that makes them “whole” again, saves them from the dialogue of

cannot take place within ‘le monde’, that is, within apparently civilised communities. In the absence of real ‘forêts’ and ‘contrées sauvages’, fictional constructions of such landscapes therefore become important spaces in which to explore behaviour which is ‘philanthrope et bienfaisant’. In her reconstruction of the desert wilderness as a pastoral landscape, however, Madame de Genlis draws out the ecologically sensitive plausibility of solitude, as a potential practice in the real world. As suggested in ‘Les Cinq premières semaines d’un journal écrit dans les Pyrénées’, solitude – as a state of mind – is synonymous with silent thought or contemplation of the natural world: an action which, by necessity, takes place in nature, and, in turn, is permeated by a divine presence.

Writing of the shepherds of the Pyrenees, in her *Souvenirs de Félicie*, Madame de Genlis comments on the sadness she initially felt ‘dans une solitude charmante’ while watching old shepherds, alone in the hills: ‘j’éprouvai un sentiment pénible en voyant ces vieillards isolés, livrés à eux-mêmes dans cette solitude’.⁸³ The scene is not, in her words, ‘le plus riant tableau’ she hoped to encounter – that for which Jaucourt’s entry in the *Encyclopédie* prepares us when he describes ‘la retraite commode et riante’, and writes of the shepherd that, ‘la simplicité, la douceur, la gaieté riante, en font toujours le caractère fondamental’.⁸⁴ And yet, upon speaking with an elderly shepherd, the author discovers that he is perfectly content. She investigates common practice within the community and determines that custom in the area dictates that:

La vie d’un paysan des Pyrénées est divisée en trois époques remarquables: il est d’abord berger des montagnes, depuis l’âge de huit ans jusqu’à quinze; ensuite il entre dans la classe des cultivateurs; enfin, parvenu à la vieillesse, il devient pâtre des vallées.⁸⁵

Ultimately, the ‘trois époques remarquables’ which demarcate different periods of the shepherd’s life not only emphasise the inherently cyclical quality of the natural world – since the young shepherd must eventually become an old shepherd – but also, it implies that solitude is a natural and even desirable condition in human life, since it is connected with the sublime meditations which Moïse experiences – being alone with God – and, subsequently, it can be productive.

Having spent many years labouring in the fields, the shepherd reveals that ‘ce repos

thought in which one remains always unequivocal, restores the identity which makes them speak with the single voice of one unexchangeable person’, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 476. By way of comparison, see also Rousseau’s *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782).

⁸³ *Souvenirs de Félicie*, p. 139, p. 141.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141, and *l’Encyclopédie*, 12. 156.

⁸⁵ *Souvenirs de Félicie*, p. 146.

est utile’, and that as ‘gardien de ces troupeaux [...] je sers aussi bien ma famille que dans le temps où je pouvais labourer la terre’.⁸⁶ Having also established a productive relationship with nature – and long since reaped the fruits of the earth – the elderly shepherd is free to contemplate the beauty of his surroundings. As in the case of Moïse, who experiences liberation from material necessity, and a sense of elation through solitude in nature, it becomes clear that, in Madame de Genlis’s writing, an aesthetically pleasing environment is the foundation for constructing a pastoral spatial imaginary in which feelings about one’s place in the *oikos* are conserved. ‘Mon imagination’, claims the old shepherd, ‘me transporte sur ces monts élevés qui se perdent dans les nuages’, and, through the memories he attaches to these mountains which he is no longer able to climb: ‘je retrouve les vives émotions, les plaisirs de ma jeunesse’.⁸⁷ The physical natural world thus inspires an abstract, aesthetic image of the *oikos* which is connected to emotions. As Bertrand Westphal asserts in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, ‘fiction does not mimic reality’ but ‘actualizes new virtualities hitherto unexpressed, which then *interact* with the real according to the hypertextual logic of interfaces’.⁸⁸ Madame de Genlis’s fictionalised representations do not replace the real, or abstract the reader from real nature, but create new ‘virtualities’ which inform citizens’ experience of the ‘natural’, and, as Westphal asserts, such writing ‘detects possibilities buried in the folds of reality’.⁸⁹ This amounts to an exploration of spaces which exist between established geographical communities and imagined communities: the new national, spatial imaginary which emerges from texts such as the *Maison rustique* and *Les Bergères de Madian*.

An incident in *Les Bergères de Madian* illustrates the point at which fiction ‘actualises new virtualities hitherto unexpressed’ in Madame de Genlis’s writing. During the terrible storm Moïse faces in the desert, he attempts to tie himself to a tree for shelter: ‘Moïse [...] veut embrasser le tronc d’un arbre et s’y tenir attaché durant la tempête’.⁹⁰ In doing so he loses his crook, the ‘houlette’ which is perhaps the most iconic symbol of the shepherd and which forms an important part of his cultural heritage, since it was created from part of a tree in his ancestors’ village: ‘ce bâton, jadis une des branches du térébinthe antique de la vallée de Mambrée, fut détaché de l’arbre par le saint Patriarche, qui si souvent se reposa sous son

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

⁸⁸ Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert Tally Jr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 103 (original emphasis).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 7.

ombrage’.⁹¹ In embracing, quite literally, new, unknown nature, Moïse loses a tie with the past, since this staff is associated with ancestors of the nation. With no physical dwelling to call home, Moïse is devastated to have lost this precious item: ‘le seul bien héréditaire que le ciel eût laissé parmi les Hébreux asservis’.⁹² Not only does this recall the ‘arbre historique’ of Berlin discussed in the first chapter, which comes to represent the *émigré*’s eternal home in nature, but also, it reminds the reader of the entry in the *Dictionnaire critique* regarding the ‘bâton pastoral’ which Madame de Genlis describes as having been made by French kings.⁹³ As a simple, commonplace, agricultural object, the ‘bâton pastoral’ comes to symbolise the nation: its very ordinariness suggestive of the extent to which all citizens may now productively contribute to the (re)construction of the social edifice. As a simple, agricultural object, ownership of the ‘bâton pastoral’ is within the grasp of all.

Like the old shepherd of the Pyrenees, Moïse too must reconstruct his ‘imagined community’ in order to find the strength to survive his terrible ordeal in the desert. He recalls the deeds of his ancestors as a way of restoring his courage during the storm: ‘je repassais dans mon imagination l’histoire d’Abraham, d’Isaac, de Jacob’.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Madame de Genlis uses the prophetic dream as a means of extending the interplay between fiction and reality, as a form of imagined community, to actualise a new virtuality. As she writes:

Il est permis de faire parler ses héros, de détailler ses sentiments, d’inventer même des situations naturelles qui puissent les développer; mais par respect pour les miracles, je ne crois pas que l’on doive se permettre de donner comme de vrais prodiges de vaines fictions, et de les confondre ainsi avec les actes les plus éclatants de la suprême puissance.⁹⁵

Thus, rather than presenting the staff itself as the subject of supernatural transformation, as in Exodus 7. 8 when the staff becomes a snake, or indeed, an instrument of supernatural power – since it is used to bring about miracles in the Bible – Madame de Genlis uses the prophetic

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 8. Stressing its full biblical importance, Madame de Genlis lists the figures who have been associated with the pastoral staff: ‘Abraham coupa cette branche, la durcit au feu, la façonna, en arrondit, en recourba l’un des bouts en forme de crosse, et en fit une houlette. Isaac s’en servit pour le même usage; Jacob l’obtint de lui, et elle devint entre ses mains un bâton de voyageur, sur lequel ce vénérable père des douze tribus était appuyé’ (p. 8).

⁹² Ibid., p. 9.

⁹³ The explanatory notes in this text are repeated in the *Dictionnaire critique*, with some familiar lines reappearing: ‘la lance de bois, la fronde, la massue, la houlette, la bêche, qu’un prince agriculteur, un guerrier avait fabriqué de ses propres mains, devenait dans sa famille un meuble respectable, un héritage précieux.’ There is however, an additional comment in *Les Bergères de Madian*, which can be read as a critique against the ever-increasing prospect of industrialism: ‘quand les arts perfectionnèrent, les ouvrages faits de la main des Héros parurent moins précieux; on pouvait les comparer à ceux des ouvrières habiles’ – and, the author reasons that descendants of ‘grands personnages’ will no longer accept such a ‘simple’ gift as a testament to their status, they will replace these with ‘chefs-d’œuvres’ and thus ‘le luxe corrupteur, en affaiblissant tous les sentiments naturels, n’a remplacé le bonheur qu’ils procuraient que par les frivoles jouissances de la vanité’ (p. 152).

⁹⁴ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 60.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

dream to suggest that the staff is a ‘natural’ object. In his dream, Moïse is visited by an angel who presents him with a new staff – ‘un rameau vert’ – and who tells him not to worry about the lost ‘bâton pastoral d’Abraham’ since ‘cette palme légère deviendra dans tes mains l’effroi des tyrans et le sujet éternel de l’étonnement des peuples’.⁹⁶ The branch, which Moïse finds by his side upon waking, is presented as an emblem of nationhood. Although he concludes that ‘cette palme n’a point été brisée par la violence du vent durant la tempête’, the use of the dream is a form of enchantment which is supposedly more rooted in the real than the offerings of the Greek mythological figures.⁹⁷ As a result, the staff is a symbol which constructs place, and extends across spaces and scales to connect various layers of fictional narrative: it allows Moïse to reconcile what has been lost with the promise of what will be.

Furthermore, the dream space is one in which Madame de Genlis can incorporate truly pastoral depictions of the natural world, as a contrast to the supposedly realistic presentation of Moïse as a leader in exile. Key examples include the ‘prés humides aux premiers beaux jours du printemps’, in addition to the angel’s beauty, impossible to capture in human language – ‘si l’art humain pouvait imiter l’éclat de la couleur et de la beauté des formes aériennes d’un être céleste’.⁹⁸ In Madame de Genlis’s writing there is, consequently, a displacement of the *oikos* as nation into the aesthetic realm. She writes, for example, in the *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai* that, ‘la vertu, le génie et les talents, voilà les véritables appuis de la puissance, les colonnes solides que le temps ne peut ébranler et qui peuvent seules soutenir les révolutions’.⁹⁹ Physical nature, in this sense, is not indestructible: a durable, national social edifice is founded instead upon a wealth of intangible, artistic qualities. These are the ‘arts’, according to Madame de Genlis, ‘qui ont immortalisé les beaux siècles de Périclès, d’Auguste, de Charlemagne, de François I, des Médicis et de Louis XIV’.¹⁰⁰ Connecting art with a range of historical leaders – a Greek statesman, an emperor, monarchs – whose respective periods of tenure become associated with national displays of cultural wealth, leads to sustained consideration of the kinds of figures that should be responsible for the maintenance of the social edifice. It is a form of positive reflection on the nation’s cultural heritage, and how it should be preserved, which anticipates the formation of the French

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁹ *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, ‘Cette épître fut commencée durant le cours d’un voyage très pénible et je l’achevai dans une Auberge à Hambourg dans la nuit du 23 Juillet 1794’ (p. 5).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 60. To this she adds: ‘rappelons-nous que ce ne fut ni par la terreur, ni en accordant de nouveaux privilèges aux patriciens’, ‘patricien’ being a term derived from the Latin, *pater*, used to denote a Roman citizen belonging to the upper echelon of society.

literary canon in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹

From this perspective, Moïse, then, is an example of a literary figure whose place in the nation's cultural pantheon is threatened by the reality of a disenchanted world. Thus, in *Les Bergères de Madian*, Madame de Genlis draws on the rich symbolism connected to his biblical persona and combines this with elements of the pastoral in order to renew his socio-cultural significance. In the text itself, Moïse is transformed from lowly shepherd to leader of a nation, and feels a palpable sense of joy while guiding his people through the desert, which he has come to know as *oikos*. For him, the desert is 'cette solitude sauvage et majestueuse où Dieu régnait seul!', a place where, 'il nous semblait qu'en touchant cette terre inculte, abandonnée, mais libre et d'une immense étendue, nous cessions d'être esclaves'.¹⁰² Recalling Jeffrey's notion of the shepherd as the 'obscure but chosen instrument' of God, Moïse is at once a distinguished leader and the voice of a nation, using vocabulary which echoes the language of the revolutionaries, specifically, the second verse of the 'Marseillaise' – 'que nous veut cette horde d'esclaves'.¹⁰³ Having enjoyed a position of privilege in Egypt as the adopted son of the Pharaoh's daughter, witnessed first-hand the slavery of the Hebrew people there, and endured the miseries of exile for having participated in the liberation of an oppressed people, Moïse's perspective is balanced: symbolic of both the exiled aristocrats and the *peuple* of France.

Wild nature, here, is associated with freedom, which Moïse understands as a metaphysical state: 'je trouvais au fond de mon âme un tel accroissement de courage, de force, d'espérance, je me sentais dégagé d'une oppression si pénible, que je croyais respirer et penser pour la première fois'.¹⁰⁴ Once again, his language calls to mind terminology prevalent in the rhetoric of the Revolution – 'une oppression si pénible' – and further extends the idea that the literary representation of landscapes contributes to the formation of an aesthetic space within which to explore so-called natural human rights – such as the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* evoked by Jaucourt's pastoral – the freedom to breathe and to think, that is, to exist, as if 'pour la première fois'. In addition, Moïse deems such landscapes beautiful, since they can be freely cultivated: 'qu'ils sont beaux ces asiles silencieux de la paix et de l'indépendance'.¹⁰⁵ Yet another reverberation of Revolutionary

¹⁰¹ The development of this process can be identified in the works of authors such as Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve. See for example his *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1869). This text was first published in 1828.

¹⁰² *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 72.

¹⁰³ See the second verse of Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle's 'La Marseillaise' of 1792.

¹⁰⁴ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

language, the term ‘indépendance’ carries weight, signifying citizens’ freedom to form new nested communities, being united through the common purpose of re-cultivating barren land.

The ‘asiles silencieux de la paix’ exist in the minds of those who contemplate them, particularly in the minds of the authors, artists, and poets who are able to give expression to such landscapes as pastoral constructs in art. Just as the interests of the both aristocrats and the *peuple* are reconciled through the figure of Moïse – who leads the nation to prosperity – the real-life figure of the author, artist, and poet can be seen to contribute to the socio-cultural wealth of the imagined community – which extends beyond the local to the national, or even universal level. As Madame de Genlis argues in her *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, written during her own exile (1796):

L’homme, qui possède un talent, n’appartient point au seul pays qui l’a vu naître; toutes les contrées où l’on cultive les sciences et les arts devraient avoir le droit de le réclamer, quand ses jours ou sa liberté sont menacés dans sa patrie.¹⁰⁶

The notion of independence is integral to the process of artistic creativity, and to the notion of the natural world as a culturally productive space: bonds between members of nested communities, and nested communities themselves, are created through the arts. The works of the exiled artist are independent in the sense that they do not belong to any particular nation, but rather, to all who seek to cultivate the arts. Art created by ‘l’homme qui possède un talent’ transcends both ownership and relevance to the local community and takes on a more universal meaning, particularly since depictions of uninhabited, wild landscapes are symbolic of political freedom – mirroring the Revolutionary project itself. Subsequently, a figure such as Moïse – a Middle Eastern, biblical shepherd – may legitimately embody the social disquiet of the French nation.

Tied to this idea in Madame de Genlis’s writing is an anxiety about the potential loss of certain socio-cultural practices which characterise and sustain the social edifice of a nation. In this same text, for example, she describes how ‘les artistes s’expatrièrent’ owing to ‘un despotisme sanguinaire’, during the Revolution, noting that the fall of an empire coincides with the expulsion of the artist figure:

Les Muses, amies de la paix, furent la chercher sous un ciel étranger: c’est ainsi que jadis, à la chute d’un empire célèbre, chassées par les furies, elles s’échappèrent de la

¹⁰⁶ *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, p. 56. ‘Cette épître fut commencée durant le cours d’un voyage très pénible et je l’achevai dans une Auberge à Hambourg dans la nuit du 23 Juillet 1794’ (p. 5).

Grèce, et furent se réfugier dans un autre climat. En France, Robespierre, un poignard à la main, leur défendit de revenir, les déclarant émigrées et déchues de toutes leurs possessions [...].¹⁰⁷

By describing French writers as artists and Muses, Madame de Genlis magnifies the importance of the arts as indicative of the socio-cultural wealth of a nation.¹⁰⁸ With the ability to find beauty in unknown landscapes, exiled artists may find a culturally productive solace in the wilderness. Like Moïse and his people, they seek their asylum in the political wilderness – the desert, or ‘dans un autre climat’ – since they seek neither ‘la faveur inconstante des Rois’, nor ‘des richesses périssables’, but rather, ‘une noble indépendance’.¹⁰⁹ Madame de Genlis’s concern for the preservation of the arts during a period of crisis is further evident when she writes:

À cette époque affreuse, quelles furent mes inquiétudes pour les gens de lettres et les artistes que j’ai connus! Pour l’excellent et véridique historien, dont les ouvrages forment le cours le plus intéressant de morale et de politique! Pour le sage ingénieux qui consacre sa vie à l’étude de la nature! Pour l’auteur charmant de l’optimiste; et pour le poète touchant qui sut peindre avec tant d’énergie les douleurs d’Œdipe et la vertu d’Antigone.¹¹⁰

The social edifice is an imagined community in that it is manifested in the works of authors who devote themselves to representations of the natural world whether through historical narrative, ‘l’étude de la nature’ or moving depictions of the human condition. Consequently, Madame de Genlis often chooses to connect figures such as the artist, poet, and musician, with the aesthetic representation of uncultivated or uninhabited pastoral landscapes. In the *Herbier Moral* published thirteen years prior to *Les Bergères de Madian*, in 1799, Madame de Genlis had already linked the experience of exile with the arts: in fact, poetry and music

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 50-51. She adds: ‘si les vainqueurs, les conquérants et les chefs des nations qui, n’ont pas respecté les monuments matériels produits par les arts, ont dans tous les siècles passé pour des barbares, que dira-t-on des hommes féroces qui détruisent les inventeurs mêmes de ces arts divins, ou ceux qui les cultivent ou les perfectionnent’ (p. 54). In this respect the despot stands accused of destroying the nation in the mind of the artists – their particular ‘imagined community’.

¹⁰⁸ Madame de Genlis also takes advantage of the general fashion for all things Greek and Roman at this time – the ever-present tension between ancient and modern: the key aesthetic debate of the period. Her contemporaries would undoubtedly have been influenced by that which Jacqueline Viaux, in *French Furniture*, describes as the ‘undisputed authority of ancient art to win their struggle against the complexion and confusion of the Rococo’, awaiting ‘the eventual reinstatement of calm, steady line and sober ornament’, which would spring from a ‘fundamentally new attitude of mind, not from a servile imagination’, Jacqueline Viaux, *French Furniture* (New York: Putnam, 1964), p. 123. Friedrich Melchior Grimm, writing of contemporary trends, states: ‘La décoration intérieure et extérieure des bâtiments, les meubles, les étoffes, les bijoux de toute espèce, tout est à Paris à la grecque’, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc.* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1968), 5. 282.

¹⁰⁹ *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, p. 87.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 51-52. A footnotes related to this passages specifies Gaillard, St. Pierre, Collin d’Harleville, Ducis.

become an almost consolatory pursuit for those in exile, who are subsequently tasked with the reconstruction of *la patrie* through their works. In ‘Le Bouquet d’Esopé’, for example, Apollo – the God of harmony – exiled from the countryside, devotes himself to the cultivation of the arts:

Jadis aux champs de la Phrygie,
Le Dieu brillant de l’harmonie
Fugitif et banni des cieux
Se consolait d’un exil rigoureux,
En consacrant son immortelle vie
A cultiver ces arts si précieux
Dont il fut comme on sait le créateur heureux,
La musique et la poésie.¹¹¹

Music and poetry become his eternal pursuit: his place – that is, his home – is not within a nation, which is here the celestial realm, but must instead be on Earth. Terms such as ‘les proscrits’ in subsequent lines make the connection with the Revolution explicit:

Malgré l’exil, ces talents enchanteurs
Seraient pour les proscrits des dons consolateurs.¹¹²

Moïse, in a similar vein, will use both poetry and music to attempt to reconnect with the eternal, or God, and to ‘puiser ces lumières surnaturelles’. When the wicked shepherd Ithamar plans to attack him, for example, Moïse’s resistance is peaceable, through music: ‘Moïse, comme de coutume, se rendit au désert, conduisant son troupeau et sans armes, ne portant avec lui que sa harpe, car il en jouait toujours avant de se livrer à la méditation’.¹¹³

Madame de Genlis notes in addition:

Ce fut ainsi que par la suite, un autre serviteur de Dieu, un grand prophète, Elisée, *avant de parler au Seigneur*, faisait venir un joueur de harpe pour disposer son âme, par des accords harmonieux, à recevoir les inspirations divines.¹¹⁴

Moïse thus sets a precedent for such behaviour, which becomes embedded in socio-cultural tradition not only as a response to crisis, but also, as a means of re-creating the spatial

¹¹¹ *Herbier moral*, p. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 146

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146. Madame de Genlis notes that, ‘ce traite est rapporté dans la Bible’ (original emphasis).

imaginary of exile: the thoughts and feelings which dispose the musician-poet to hear from God. Thus, ‘Moïse, assis sur un rocher, chanta sur sa harpe les louanges du Seigneur’ and, subsequently, ‘il écoute en silence la voix céleste qui parlait à son cœur’.¹¹⁵ The theme of silence, which is traditionally associated with the pastoral and Jaucourt’s ‘images oisives et muettes’, takes on a divine aspect: as quiet, aesthetic resistance. As Moïse is doing this, ‘une intelligence surnaturelle exalte son imagination’ and he is able to see the way forward for himself and his people, to understand his environment through an aesthetic experience produced by human culture.¹¹⁶ A supernatural intelligence ‘l’arrache à la terre, l’élève au-dessus de ces nuages d’or’ and ‘il se trouve au pied du trône de l’Éternel’.¹¹⁷ In this way, the condition of exile, rather than being indicative of an entirely misfortunate state – ‘banni des cieux’ in the case of Apollon – is inverted, recalling once again the biblical notion that obscurity may be preparation for greatness: the *émigré* who has re-personalised his or her relationship with the natural world has the capacity to lead and to serve newly formed, nested communities.

This is a representation which emerges across Madame de Genlis’s *œuvre* and which further emphasises the overlapping depictions of culturally constructed landscapes in both her fiction and non-fiction. Writing of her stay with Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby in a remote cottage in Wales, in her *Suite des souvenirs de Félicie L****, she describes the shepherds who play their harps on the mountainside:

Aujourd’hui encore, les pâtres de la principauté de Galles jouent de la harpe dans les champs et sur les montagnes. L’élégance de cet instrument et l’éclat de son harmonie donnent à ces pâtres quelque chose de romanesque qui les fait ressembler à des bergers d’églogues.¹¹⁸

The reality of life for the Welsh shepherds is attributed a Romantic quality which connects them to an imagined, Arcadian past which is between fiction and reality. Indeed, Madame de Genlis composes an image around the shepherds which is suggestive of an idealised, pastoral ecosphere, which once flourished across its various nested communities:

Toute cette côte solitaire était sans doute alors florissante et peuplée; maintenant elle est livrée à la seule nature: on n’y voit plus aujourd’hui que des troupeaux de chèvres, et

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 146 and p. 147.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹⁸ *Suite des souvenirs de Félicie L****, p. 304. Infamously known as the ‘Ladies of Llangollen’ for having lived together as spinsters, in a remote cottage.

quelques pâtres dispersés, assis sur les rochers, et jouant de la harpe irlandaise. En face de ce tableau agreste et mélancolique, les deux amies ont fait poser un siège de verdure, ombragé par deux peupliers, et c'est là, me dirent-elles que souvent en été elles viennent relire les poésies d'Ossian.¹¹⁹

The solitary shepherds are all that remain of the Romanticised vision, and their music is the sole remaining means of promoting humankind's reconciliation with nature. In this artificially aestheticised space, music and poetry are imbued with a sense of cultural agency, and an act such as reading 'les poésies d'Ossian' is considered to be 'natural'. Aspects of this experience are also incorporated into her fictional work, indicative once again of the various layers of fact and fiction which together construct new ideas about humankind's place in the rural landscape.¹²⁰ Madame de Genlis is apparently unaware of the fact that the works of Ossian are not authentic, and, yet this adds a further layer of artifice or enchantment to the text.¹²¹ Thomas M. Curly's extensive research on this topic, which investigates both the extent of knowledge of and contemporary reception of the deceit, comments of Samuel Johnson for instance that, 'no writer angered [him] more than did James Macpherson for perpetrating what arguably became the most successful literary falsehood in modern history'.¹²² Nevertheless, the reference to Ossian in Madame de Genlis's writing demonstrates how artificial constructs such as those cultivated within and perpetuated by socio-cultural production – specifically, here, the text – shape humankind's relationship with its environment.

For her, the poetic voice becomes a measure by which to regain control of the environment. When Moïse arrives in the Madian, it appears to him that the voices of the shepherds overshadow those of non-human nature: 'le bruit croissait avec le jour; les échos répétaient les bêlements des agneaux et les mugissements de la génisse; mais la voix dominatrice de l'homme semblait par intervalles imposer silence aux animaux et commander

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

¹²⁰ In the fictional text, *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, Laurent, for example, refers to the Welsh village which Madame de Genlis had visited: 'le soir je retournais dans le village de Llangollen, où je couchais. Il n'y a pas de gens meilleurs sur la terre que ceux de ce pays; on n'y entend jamais parler de vols et de mauvaises actions, et puis le lieu est charmant. On y voit des ruines des cerisiers, et des bergers jouant de la harpe sur les rochers. Oh! C'est bien beau si ce n'était leur baragouin; on voudrait passer sa vie avec eux', *Les Veillées de la chaumière*, p. 22.

¹²¹ Eric Partridge, in *The French Romantics Knowledge of English Literature, 1820-1848* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), suggests that Madame de Genlis was sincere in her belief that Ossian's work was legitimate: 'In 1811 Madame de Genlis sent a letter to Casimir Baecker [her adopted son], who afterwards set the verses to music, enclosed an eulogistic poem on "ce barde intrépide et fameux, le superbe Ossian" (p. 40).

¹²² Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, The Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

souverainement à la nature entière'.¹²³ The bleating of the lambs is only attributed meaning alongside the voice of humankind which dominates the natural world. Both are 'natural' but only humankind is gifted with the poetic ability to render such scenes as silent pastoral images through which to explore the relationship between human beings and their environment. As a final example, writing of her cottage in the Pyrenees, in the *Souvenirs de Félicie*, Madame de Genlis describes the aesthetic soundscape which connects her to the environment:

Dans ma paisible cabane je n'entendais que la voix majestueuse de la nature, la chute imposante et rapide des cascades et des torrents, le mugissement des troupeaux dispersés dans la prairie, les sons rustiques du flageolet, des cornemuses, et les airs champêtres que répétaient les jeunes pâtres assis sur la cime des rochers.¹²⁴

Here solitude is not equated with silence. The majestic voice of nature is both human and non-human: notably, the alluring music of the shepherds is presented as inseparable from that of nature. The various sounds of the non-human natural world, offset by the shepherd's music, represent a state of ecological harmony: evidence perhaps of Buell's 'mutual constructionism' in nature whereby the natural world inspires cultural production and this cultural production enhances the natural world.

CONCLUSION

Madame de Genlis's post-Revolutionary natural world is no longer, as Worster suggests, 'designed to endure forever as the exact same order of objects interacting with one another in the same old way, surmounting the vicissitudes of time'.¹²⁵ Her pastoral is somewhere between fact and fiction; the idyll is a multidimensional sanctuary for socio-cultural values and Madame de Genlis ascribes cultural significance to landscape as a way of promoting care for the *oikos* and national unity. An ecocritical reading of her writing situates the pastoral trope as a response to socio-cultural upheaval, and in addition, it points towards a number of tensions embodied by the figure of the shepherd which inhabits this type of literary landscape: a figure simultaneously involved in Bennett's 'web of relations' and yet on the

¹²³ *Les Bergères de Madian*, p. 24.

¹²⁴ *Souvenirs de Félicie*, p. 140.

¹²⁵ Worster, *The Wealth of Nature*, p. 10.

margins of it, both a leader and a follower, an instrument of what Madame de Genlis views as rational enlightenment and of theological morality, a symbol of sophisticated culture and humble nature-dweller.

The shepherd, in particular, is a figure embedded in the tradition of pastoral poetry – as its subject and its narrator – a creator of poetic and musical works.¹²⁶ In this regard, he is able to construct his own particular kind of cultural infrastructure, and these practices, in turn, contribute to the nation as an ‘imagined community’. As Jaucourt explains: ‘les bergers n’ont pas seulement leur poésie, ils ont encore leurs danses, leur musique, leurs parures, leurs fêtes, leur architecture, s’il est permis de donner ce nom à des buissons, à des bosquets, à des côteaux’.¹²⁷ In Madame de Genlis’s writing, such figures are shown to be productive in a threefold sense: they are agriculturally productive within the landscapes they inhabit, artistically or culturally productive through poetry and song, and, in addition, they fulfil a symbolic role in the national imagination.

As opposed to Buell’s pastoral dichotomy, which he suggests may either direct readers towards the realm of physical nature or abstract them from it, texts such as *Les Bergères de Madian* guide the reader towards physical nature through abstraction from it. Connecting the arts with exile and the wilderness informs socio-cultural tradition. In this way, the figure of the shepherd contributes to Madame de Genlis’s imaginative re-writing of the Revolutionary narrative, which replaces one form of enchantment with another. The shepherd, representative of both the lowly peasant and exiled aristocrat, is a political figure of resistance linking back to what she presents as an idealised past, while simultaneously becoming literary symbols of progress.

¹²⁶ Terry Gifford defines the pastoral as ‘a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into drama, and more recently could be recognised in novels’, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt, 12. 157.

CONCLUSION

Madame de Genlis's attachment to home – in a threefold sense, as physical place of dwelling, local community, and unified nation – is deep and abiding. Despite having lived through the unprecedented social and political upheaval brought about by the Revolution and having experienced first-hand both the exile and bereavement that came with it, she nevertheless asserts that, 'quand il serait possible que la patrie nous fit une injustice, il faudrait encore conserver de l'attachement pour le pays où l'on a reçu le jour, et c'est un sentiment naturel à toutes les belles âmes'.¹ The nation, or 'la patrie', in her writing, is at once an imagined community and a physical environment: 'le pays où l'on a reçu le jour'. This is indicative of her belief not only in an apparently natural relationship between citizen and the nation – 'un sentiment naturel à toutes les belles âmes' – but also, in one which extends beyond the realm of geographical environment, to include thoughts, feelings, and socio-cultural constructs connected to the idea of home and homeland.

Her desire to preserve the social edifice, and to strengthen the bonds of nationhood by encouraging the citizen's renewed relationship with nature and the natural, can be aligned with the modern ecocritical project. It anticipates the reflections of numerous scholars, scientists, philosophers, theologians, and civic groups on the subject of environmental degradation which today's society must face. Bookchin, for example, argues that 'societies have to be defended and preserved with a sense of deliberate purpose' if they are to withstand ecological deterioration.² As we have seen throughout the chapters of this thesis, Madame de Genlis's interpretation of 'le naturel' is itself an artificial construct in her writing which, in turn, is used to reconstruct the French nation. In addition to serving as a barometer for socio-cultural change, 'le naturel' represents an aesthetic ideal and moral standard by which all things are measured: *la vie champêtre*, working the land, hierarchy, divine order in nature, the pastoral shepherd with his poetry and song – all are depicted as 'natural', and therefore, as good.³ In this sense, Madame de Genlis's works can be said to conform to the ethical orientation of ecocritical thought, since, as Timothy Clark explains, 'the moral impetus behind ecocriticism [...] necessarily commits it to take some kind of stance, however implicit,

¹ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 43.

² Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 24.

³ A characteristic which her ideal citizens would possess, as she writes in the *Dictionnaire critique*: 'les qualités indispensables d'un bon style sont: la clarté, le naturel, la pureté, l'harmonie, l'élégance' (II. 314).

on the huge issue of what relationship human beings should have to the natural world'.⁴ This is an integral part of Madame de Genlis's writing, which addresses themes such as sustainability, social responsibility, moral order, and the development of 'natural' hierarchies as a means of overcoming alienation from the *oikos*.

These important themes in her work, as we have seen, are couched in a divine interpretation of nature: they are mediated through or founded upon her staunch religious values. Too often this aspect of her writing has been disregarded as dry moralising, and yet, it colours her entire worldview and her understanding of humankind's relationship with the natural world.⁵ This study situates Madame de Genlis's writing at the very centre of Enlightenment debate. In accordance with Montoya's suggestion that Madame de Genlis 'might usefully be considered not so much as a critic of the Enlightenment or an author on the margins of the Enlightenment mainstream, but as a particular kind of critic from within', this thesis therefore underlines the author's engagement with crucial contemporary debates – addressing such topics as morality, social responsibility, the citizen's place in the social edifice, individualism, and *les droits de l'homme et du citoyen*.⁶ Madame de Genlis does not negate the need for scientific advancement in post-Revolutionary society – quite the opposite – since texts such as the *Maison rustique* draw on material extracted from the *Encyclopédie* and from the works of natural historians, botanists, and practitioners of medicine, to explain technical, scientific, and manufacturing processes. In her writing, however, she replaces *la religion naturelle* with her own construction of religion as a natural foundation for morality.

Unlike many contemporary ecocritics, such as Bookchin, who develop entirely secular notions of social ecology, Madame de Genlis's societal project is rooted in Christian ethics. She highlights humankind's need for religion, which, for her, is inextricably linked to her understanding of the natural world. As she writes:

Il faut au peuple une religion. Plus les hommes sont rapprochés de la nature, plus ils sentent ce besoin, ce désir sublime inspiré par l'espoir et par la reconnaissance. L'athéisme est un rêve monstrueux de l'homme civilisé, corrompu par l'orgueil; tous les sauvages ont établi parmi eux des cérémonies religieuses.⁷

⁴ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 5.

⁵ Montoya is the first to underline this point in 2013, adding that Madame de Genlis 'is not the insipid moralist her critics held her to be' (p. 2).

⁶ Ibid. Such contemporary debates correspond with what Pope Francis has recently described as 'the urgent challenge to protect our common home', which, 'includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development', in *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for our Common Home* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015), p. 12.

⁷ In *Les Mères rivales ou la Calomnie*, pp. 9-10.

For her, atheism represents sterile and unproductive thought, which enshrines individualism and opposes the communitarian character of her social ideology. In her view, atheist thought is destructive through what she regards as its emphasis on humankind's superiority and detachment from the natural world: dominating the land and pleasing itself with no regard for its place within nested communities.⁸ Indeed, the rise of individualism and with it, the idea that human beings are superior to the non-human other, is an issue central to Madame de Genlis's social commentary; however, it is also one which continues to resonate within the modern-day debate on environmental deterioration.

Bookchin, for example, argues that humankind's sense of superiority – and therefore alienation from the natural world – has 'percolated into virtually every realm of experience, it had assimilated the syntax of everyday discourse – the very relationship between subject and object, humanity and nature', recalling Nash's 'expressions of daily life', which define the nineteenth-century *pays d'origine*.⁹ Pope Francis, meanwhile, in *The Church of Mercy*, denounces the 'culture of selfishness and individualism that often prevails in our society', adding that this is not 'what builds up and leads up to a more habitable world; rather it is the culture of solidarity that does so; the culture of solidarity means seeing each other not as rivals or statistics, but as brothers and sisters'.¹⁰ And yet, by emphasising the importance of the local, rural community and the bonds of nature in her writing, Madame de Genlis's rural model is applicable within secular and non-secular communities alike. Recalling Schwarz's and Schwarz's notion of 'holistic living' – whereby the 'spiritual is not identified with any actual religion, nor confined to religious sentiment; it includes the intuitive, the non-measurable, the aesthetic, the caring and the loving' – Madame de Genlis presents her readers with a complete, eco-centric ideology through which to reconstruct the French Nation.¹¹

The ecocritical mode of reading is one which suggests that literary scholars need to re-examine the critical framework used to cast light on the complex interrelations between citizens inhabiting environments under immense strain. Ecocriticism, therefore, does not simply reduce the complexity of analytical themes through one overarching explanation – such as the 'enlightenment narratives of the progressive conquest of human nature' described

⁸ Pope Francis in his 'Address to the Plenary of the Conference', United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Second International Conference on Nutrition, Rome, 20 November 2014, suggests that 'God always forgives, men sometimes forgive, but nature never forgives'. This notion has interesting implications in light of Madame de Genlis's nested communities, since the need for forgiveness separates human beings from the non-human other.

⁹ Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 131.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, ed. by Giuliano Vigini (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2014), p. 137.

¹¹ Schwarz and Schwarz, p. 235.

by Clark – but acknowledges the need to continuously redefine and reconsider critical parameters which should reflect changes in the ecosphere itself.¹² Seen in this light, the Revolution, for instance, cannot be reduced to an historical class struggle, but instead, must be examined as a response to crisis. Similarly, Madame de Genlis's writing inflects changes in post-Revolutionary society and is consequently a nuanced perspective that attempts, in a manner which mirrors ecocritical thought, to re-spiritualise the natural world and to give nature a voice. As Clark elaborates, analysis of such themes within the field of ecocriticism 'is a huge philosophical and even religious demand and, unsurprisingly, many ecocritical essays fall short of it'.¹³ Clark also identifies the 'intellectual instability of some ecocritical texts, torn as they often are between revisionist insights and lapses, as if on numbed recoil, into outmoded kinds of romanticism or new age rhetoric'.¹⁴ This study, by contrast, underlines the importance of ecocriticism as a critical framework and a mode of reading nineteenth-century texts. It identifies the currents of Romanticism in Madame de Genlis's representation of the natural world which sit alongside a divine interpretation of nature: her writing anticipates and exists between Clark's 'romanticism and new age rhetoric'.

Couching her interpretation of the divine in natural terms is integral to the formation of moral communities which are ultimately linked with the development of a national consciousness. The idea that nature and the natural are constructs fabricated by humankind mirrors tensions and anxieties about the conservation of the natural world which emerge in today's environmental literature – the dominance of an anthropocentrism which engenders disjunction between an aesthetic focus on and political management of the environment, often embodied by the 'wilderness myth'.¹⁵ Scott Hess, in 'Imagining an Everyday Nature', draws attention to the recent tendency to use literary representations of the natural world as a

¹² Clark, p. 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Worster reports that environmental historians in the twentieth century have debated 'whether the wilderness ever really existed or whether it was a figment of the astonished, naive European imagination', *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5. Alison Byerly in 'The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System' in Glotfelty and Fromm, offers additional context for the wilderness myth: 'the American idea of the wilderness might seem closer to the aesthetic category of the sublime than to the picturesque. In fact, the American wilderness has gradually been transformed from a sublime landscape into a series of picturesque scenes. The sublime vistas that staggered the imaginations of early settlers in a sense no longer exist. The feeling of awe that is inspired by a "sublime" scene depends on the spectator's sense of its dominant power and its ability to call forth a visionary grasp of infinity. The American wilderness, however, has been gradually reduced and circumscribed until it no longer seems to stretch into infinity, but is contained and controlled within established boundaries. The conscious aesthetic framing of the landscape that typified the picturesque movement is, I will argue, replicated in the carefully delineated borders of our national parks' (p. 53).

locus for preserving that which is at risk of becoming lost, whether species or socio-cultural values:

Nature in environmental writing and culture today often appears as a form of refuge – for biological diversity, endangered species, and equally endangered forms of sensual, aesthetic and spiritual life, all threatened by an increasingly destructive and all-pervasive world economic and social order.¹⁶

As a site of refuge during exile, a place where *émigrés* fearing for their lives may establish a home, as well as a haven for the ‘endangered forms of sensual, aesthetic and spiritual life’, to which Hess refers, Madame de Genlis does indeed present the rural environment as a kind of sanctuary – as evidenced in texts such as *Les Bergères de Madian*. An integral theme throughout her body of post-Revolutionary writing, this is the primary focus of texts such as her *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, for example, in which she expresses an explicit desire for ‘une retraite chérie’, and an ‘asile désiré, mais encore inconnu’.¹⁷ Both texts emphasise an aestheticised, pastoral portrayal of the natural world, which is magnified by use of the poetic form:

Peut-être un jour livrée à la merci de l’onde,
J’irai chercher un nouveau monde
Et des hommes plus tolérants.¹⁸

Beyond an idyllic asylum, Madame de Genlis hopes that unexplored areas of the natural world may yet hold the promise of a kind of utopia – ‘un nouveau monde’ – unexplored lands which could be successfully ‘colonised’ through cultivation of the land. However, as Hess argues:

In providing this sense of refuge [...] our ideas of nature often lead us away from where we actually are, promoting a model of Romantic imaginative escapism and autonomous individualism that in many ways actually supports the same modern consumer order that it claims to oppose.¹⁹

¹⁶ Scott Hess, ‘Imagining an Everyday Nature’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, 17 (2010), 85-112 (p. 85).

¹⁷ *Épître à l’asile que j’aurai*, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Hess, p. 85.

While shedding light on such tensions and ambiguities in Madame de Genlis's work – those present, for example, in the relationship between pre- and post-Revolutionary forms of socio-cultural practice, and between the newly entitled citizen, as individual, and society – this study has illuminated additional complexities in the author's *œuvre*: a form of pragmatism in her writing which transcends an escapist or purely sentimental, textually descriptive sense of nostalgia for the social edifice that has been lost, inspiring, instead, the creation of instructional texts.²⁰

In this regard, significant parallels may be drawn once again between Madame de Genlis's writing and modern-day ecocritical discourses. Environmentalist Edward Goldsmith, in his 'Blueprint for Survival', argues that the most 'radical change' necessary to the creation of a new, ecological, social system is decentralisation.²¹ This is a principle embodied through the organically formed nested communities depicted in Madame de Genlis's writing. Goldsmith stresses, however, that this is not because he is 'sunk in the nostalgia for a mythical little England of fêtes, olde worlde pubs, and perpetual conversations over garden fences', but for 'fundamental reasons'.²² These include the practical advantages of a model which redistributes centralised power in a way that eclipses simple longings for pre-industrial, pre-neoliberal modes of society. In particular, he highlights the possibility of improved legislative processes, technological advancements in industry, a greater sense of cooperation within communities, and finally, humankind's reduced overall impact on the ecosphere, through application of this model.

Consequently, one of the overarching aims of this study has been to galvanise interest in Madame de Genlis's practical texts – which have until now been overlooked by literary scholars – and, moreover, to attribute proper importance to a body of writing which is concerned with restoring a sense of balance and promoting reconciliation within and across the nested communities of the nineteenth-century French nation. Furthermore, the ecocritical approach frames Madame de Genlis's writing as a comprehensive programme of reading which promotes ecological sensitivity and advocates practical action. The rural model, and the socially responsible behaviours it exemplifies, can be considered, therefore, as a response to the 'injustice' of the Revolution – so frequently embodied by the figure of 'tyran

²⁰ Writers such as Worster suggest that nostalgia 'runs all through' society, and fortunately so, 'for it may be our only hope of salvation', since it elicits a certain sense of loss while being compatible with the desire to conserve ecosystems' (p. 3). With loss – the loss of 'entire ecological communities, complete landscapes', for example, comes the loss of 'a considerable range of human feelings – the delight and the joy, the humility that may come from standing in the presence of what we have called the wilderness' (p. 5).

²¹ Goldsmith, p. 50.

²² Ibid.

sanguinaire' in her texts – who, acting in the name of 'la patrie', banishes 'les belles âmes' from France, thereby dismantling established social hierarchies and their associated socio-cultural practices.²³ It can be viewed as a form of literary participation in the reconstruction of post-Revolutionary France, through implicit textual exploration of human beings' multifaceted relationship with their environment and an explicit attempt to transform or reorient this relationship through instructional writing. Like the nested communities which are manifested in Madame de Genlis's hybrid texts, patterns of instructional intra- and inter-textuality are formed within and across her body of work.

The *Maison rustique* is a key example, written with the explicit aim of educating a predominantly *émigré* readership about life in the countryside. It provides guidance on cultivating the land, botany, science, natural history, and morality amongst a range of other topics. The *Maison rustique* is complemented by a range of additional texts, such as the *Botanique*, *Herbier moral*, and the *Catéchisme de morale*. Although these can be read as autonomous works, they each contribute to one overarching, ecologically diverse, reconstructive narrative. The practical dimension of this text, which extends as far as to include a list of appropriate books which should be purchased for educational use in the country home, a method for mixing lime and chalk as whitewash and guidance on choosing furnishings, is couched in a fictional narrative which places the old France of the *ancien régime* and the new, emerging nation side by side. The text looks forward to the children's new 'héritage': a relationship with the land and with the inhabitants of the local village which anticipates Leopold's notion of a 'land community', and subsequently gives expression to his idea of a 'land ethic'.

An ecocritical reading constitutes a new direction within Genlisian studies, in addition to providing a historical context for notions of self-sustainability and decentralisation which may have significant consequences for the way in which the work of other nineteenth century authors is understood.²⁴ It is an analytical method which offers new avenues of exploration relating to nineteenth-century ideas about ecological harmony and how they shape present-day responses to environmental crisis. Ecocritical analysis of nineteenth-century literature would cast light on themes such as industrialisation, individualism, consumerism, and alienation from the natural world which begin to emerge during this period. For example, Massimo Quaini, in *Geography and Marxism*, investigates the notion of humankind's

²³ See, for example, the *Maison rustique*, *Les Bergères du Madian* and *Épître à l'asile que j'aurai*.

²⁴ This is especially true since the wide-reaching works of this prolific author influenced the writings of her contemporaries – direct reference to her work is made in both Austen and Tolstoy's text, to name but two examples.

estrangement from the natural world in Marx's *Grundrisse*. He considers this to be the story of 'the progressive dissociation of man from his environment or territory, following the transformation of the land from its use value to its exchange or commodity value', and furthermore, as a:

Completely fresh view of history as the story of *the separation of the producer or worker from his means of production and from his conditions of work*, or, in other words, *history as the story of man's expropriation from nature and from the primitive, natural community*.²⁵

This ecocritical overview helps illustrate how the writings of other nineteenth-century authors might be re-evaluated. From this perspective Madame de Genlis's texts present a view of history as the story of the association of humankind with its means of production and with its conditions of work – or rural environment – thereby constructing a narrative in which the cooperative bond between human and non-human nature is at the centre of her societal project. It is an approach which requires that we re-examine scholarship relating to this period, with the aim of reaching more nuanced conclusions which reflect the true complexity of humankind's relationship with the natural world and how such a relationship informs the development of imagined communities, that is, the nation.

This is in opposition to reductive portrayals of Revolutionary history which frequently pit a conservative or aristocratic extreme against an idealistic, utopian view of social reform. Writing early in the twentieth century, author Mary Duclaux, in *The Fields of France* (1903), for instance, argues that:

In all ages, I think, patriotism in France has shown two sides – two faces, if you will; the one aristocratic, desiring the advancement of the nation by means of an *élite*, a chosen few, to whose perfection the common sort were to be sacrificed; the other, essentially popular, full of dreams and visions, plotting a general happiness and justice made absolute on earth.²⁶

Duclaux's sentiment is one which has persisted and which is echoed in more recent scholarship. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, in *Flagging Patriotism: Crises of Narcissism and Anti-Americanism*, present a similar expression of patriotism in France: 'Janus-Faced, French nationalism looks towards two distinct traditions: a rightist "blood and soil" nationalism and

²⁵ Massimo Quaini, *Geography and Marxism* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 57 (original emphasis, used to denote quotation from Marx).

²⁶ Agnes Mary Frances Robinson, *The Fields of France* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), p. 47.

a more universalist idea of a global emancipatory mission for France'.²⁷ The ecocritical lens reveals, however, a more complicated presentation of social reconstruction, which emerges from the work of nineteenth-century writers: one which is beset by tensions, which in turn, raise further questions about the preservation of the social edifice at this time.

Showing sensitivity to the underlying issue of the country's long-term prosperity, in her *Dictionnaire critique*, Madame de Genlis asks: 'dans tous les temps et dans toutes les situations, quel Français pourrait être insensible à la gloire ou à l'abaissement de son pays?'.²⁸ She draws attention to the need for the individual's commitment to the nation in a way that prioritises society's needs and is suggestive of a purposive force of nature, equated with the divine, directing the future of the nation. From an ecocritical perspective the very notion of the possible 'gloire' or 'abaissement' of a country is contentious, and yet, it is an essential consideration in the context of national reconstruction. Both are socio-cultural constructs which have implications for how the relationship between environment, citizenship, and nation is understood, particularly since they prompt questions about what such terms might mean in the context of radical socio-political upheaval from *ancien régime* to Revolution, and subsequently, to Empire: that is, in a nation under construction. Such questions sit at the heart of the ecocritical project which, in the face of the environmental collapse of the planet, our earthly home, investigates how cultural assumptions and practices shape conceptions of nature and the natural alongside strategies for conservation, management, and reconstruction.

Ecocriticism, in Clark's view, 'is necessarily a provocative misfit in literary and cultural debate', because it deals with an overwhelmingly diverse range of question across a kaleidoscopic variety of fields.²⁹ Indeed, some might argue that the extent of its theoretical potential is infinite, since the questions it provokes are fundamental to the very continuation of the Earth's existence. In his words, 'the limits of the competence of any one intellectual discipline' are very soon reached since the matters under discussion 'often require an environmental and scientific literacy as well a critical and historical one'.³⁰ It is therefore inherently comparative and requires cross-disciplinary cooperation: as Worster argues 'scholars need it, environmental history needs it, and so does the earth'.³¹

Two international conferences with an ecocritical focus are due to take place in

²⁷ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Flagging Patriotism: Crises of Narcissism and Anti-Americanism* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 40.

²⁸ *Dictionnaire critique*, II. 43.

²⁹ Clark, p. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³¹ Worster, p. 306.

France in June 2016: 'Quelles écocritiques européennes? Defining European Ecocriticism', at the Université d'Angers, and 'Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Re-enchanting the Earth' at the Université de Perpignan. In addition, the *Forum for Modern Language Studies* prize 2016 is on the subject of 'Ecologies'. Yet, despite growing interest, ecocriticism remains on the periphery of French literary studies, in contrast to studies undertaken on a wealth of canonical authors belonging to the Anglophone tradition, such as Shakespeare and Chaucer.³² Stephanie Posthumus has already commented on the lack of ecocritical focus in the French political sphere and within French studies more generally and has sought to make literature the battleground for ecological debate: 'si la pensée écologique tard à s'épanouir dans les domaines philosophique et politique en France, nous sommes de l'avis que la littérature peut servir de terrain propice pour cultiver une nouvelle approche écologique'.³³ Literature, she claims, is a space in which to imagine 'de nouveaux modes de vivre, de nouvelles réalités, et donc, de nouveaux rapports au monde, à la planète et à la terre'.³⁴ This is, to a great extent – as illustrated by analysis of the rural model – the objective of Madame de Genlis's body of writing, in accordance with James Fleming Jones's conception of utopia, which, he suggests, stems from:

One of the oldest, most important and most basic of human needs, that is, the persistently recurring desire to admit, if only to oneself and if only for a moment, that there is no compulsion to accept a given situation or set of circumstances as the sole reality conceivable.³⁵

While remembering 'those relatively few persons who actually set out to establish utopia in the New World', he emphasises that 'there were not many who seriously gave credence to the reality or possibility of utopia as a physical entity'.³⁶ Madame de Genlis's vision of the ideal French nation takes shape in the pages of her texts. Although idealistic, ultimately, her communitarian vision, by aiming to construct a natural moral order, negates Douthwaite's claim that her educational programme is a 'highly stylized, manipulative program that

³² See, for example, Simon C. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), *Ecocritical Shakespeare: Ecocritical and Scientific Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), Gillian Rudd, 'Making the Rocks Disappear: Ecocriticism and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and *Franklin's Tale*', in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by J. Parham (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2002), pp. 117-129. Susan Rowland in *The Ecocritical Psyche: Literature, Evolutionary Complexity and Jung* (Hove: Routledge, 2012) examines the work of a diverse range of authors including Shakespeare, Austen, the Brontë sisters and C. S. Lewis.

³³ Stephanie Posthumus, 'Vers une ecocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres', *Mosaic*, 44, (2011), 85-100.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ James Fleming Jones, *La Nouvelle Héloïse: Rousseau and Utopia* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1978), p. 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

resembles nothing so much as the ultimate dream of a despotism run by initiates of an “enlightened” social control’.³⁷ Instead, this thesis demonstrates how Madame de Genlis’s reconstructive project promotes ecological stability in home and homeland, by suggesting measured, pragmatic and sensitive response to crisis.

In his history of the Pilgrim Father’s first settlements in Massachusetts, while drawing attention to the fact that the ‘first law of the pilgrim statute book was that each man should build his own house’, William Carlos Martyn also reminds us that:

Soil does not make a state, nor does geographical position. That spot of ground which men call Athens does not embrace the immortal city. It bears up its masonry; but the Athens of Socrates and of Plato exists in the mind of every scholar. The intellectual elements which enter into and shape it, these are the real state.³⁸

Madame de Genlis, therefore, can be considered as the literary architect of an idealised, ecological depiction of home. In this sense, her France is in the very pages of her work, as she participates in the act of literary nation building. She advances this process through practical action, providing her reader with a comprehensive treasury of information with which they can build a model home, and consequently, live an ecologically sensitive life. Ultimately, this study has drawn upon ecocritical theory as a means of illuminating the interrelatedness of environment, citizenship, and the nation in Madame de Genlis’s portrayal of post-Revolutionary France. Her ideal citizens must re-negotiate their place within a new social edifice: the local environment of the rural community and the emerging national environment of nineteenth-century France. Although *émigrés* and *paysans* experienced the physical and cultural displacement associated with the Revolution differently, Madame de Genlis’s texts present strategies for rehabilitation in order for both groups to readjust to their home: a nation under construction.

³⁷ Douthwaite, p. 149.

³⁸ William Carlos Martyn, *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England: A History* (New York: American Tract Society, 1867), p. 90, p.18.

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